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Fantasy AND Science Fiction

SPECIAL Damon Knight ISSUE

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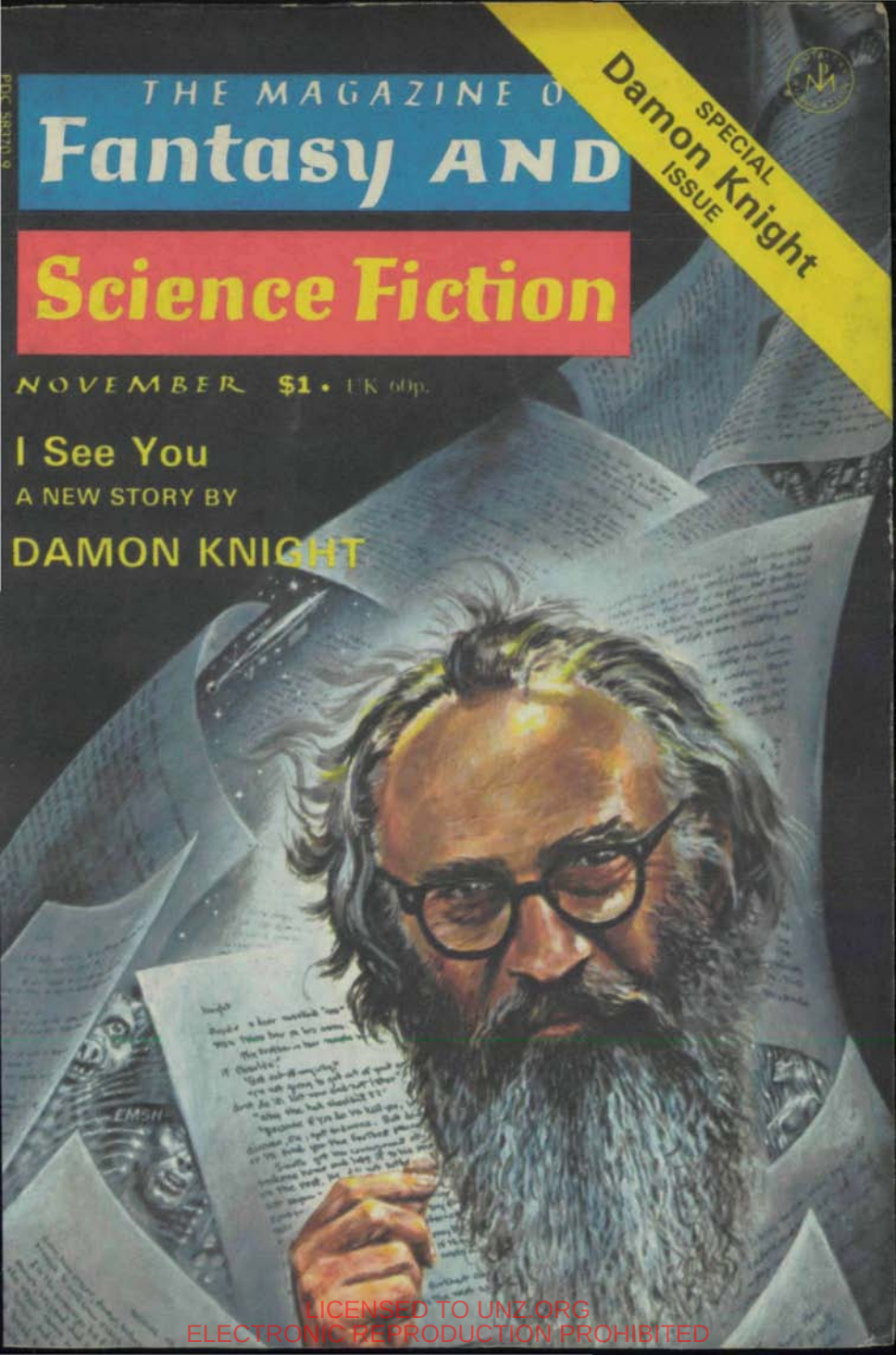
I See You

A NEW STORY BY

DAMON KNIGHT



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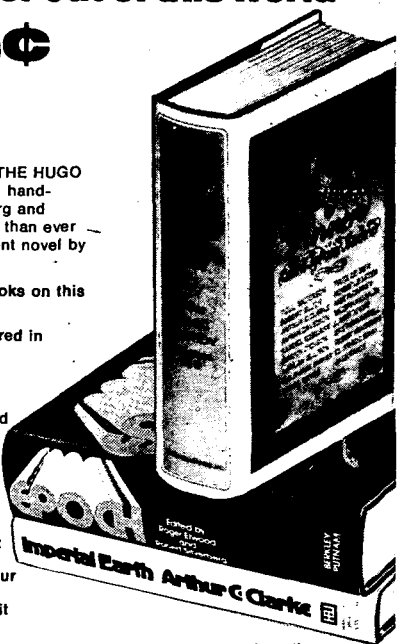

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Here is the first new Damon Knight story in several years. As might be expected, it is a totally fresh piece of work and it shines with quality. It also comes close to what Ted Sturgeon's article (in another context) calls an "absolute peak of efficiency and economy." Damon says of it: "You may think it is a short story, but it is really a novel on the plan of A For Anything *and* Hell's Pavement, *only much compressed.*

I See You

by DAMON KNIGHT

You are five, hiding in a place only you know. You are covered with bark dust, scratched by twigs, sweaty and hot. A wind sighs in the aspen leaves. A faint steady hiss comes from the viewer you hold in your hands; then a voice: "Lorie, I see you — under the barn, eating an apple!" A silence. "Lorie, come on out, I see you." Another voice. "That's right, she's in there." After a moment, sulkily: "Oh, okay."

You squirm around, raising the viewer to aim it down the hill. As you turn the knob with your thumb, the bright image races toward you, trees hurling themselves into red darkness and vanishing, then the houses in the compound, and now you see Bruce standing beside the corral, looking into his viewer, slowly turning. His back is to you; you know you are safe, and you sit up. A jay passes with a whir of wings, settles on a branch. With your own eyes now you can see Bruce, only a dot of blue beyond the gray shake walls of the houses. In the viewer, he is turning toward you, and you duck again. Another voice: "Children, come in and get washed for dinner now." "Aw, Aunt Ellie!" "Mom, we're playing hide and seek. Can't we just stay fifteen minutes more?""Please, Aunt Ellie!" "No, come on in now — you'll have plenty of time after dinner." And Bruce: "Aw, okay. All out's in free." And once more they have not found you; your secret place is yours alone.

Call him Smith. He was the president of a company that bore his name and which held more than a hundred patents in the scientific instrument field. He was sixty, a widower. His only daughter and her husband had been killed in a plane crash in 1978. He had a partner who handled the business operations now; Smith spent most of his

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time in his own lab. In the spring of 1990 he was working on an image intensification device that was puzzling because it was too good. He had it on his bench now, aimed at a deep shadow box across the room; at the back of the box was a card ruled with black, green, red and blue lines. The only source of illumination was a single ten-watt bulb hung behind the shadow box; the light reflected from the card did not even register on his meter, and yet the image in the screen of his device was sharp and bright. When he varied the inputs to the components in a certain way, the bright image vanished and was replaced by shadows, like the ghost of another image. He had monitored every television channel, had shielded the device against radio frequencies, and the ghosts remained. Increasing the illumination did not make them clearer. They were vaguely rectilinear shapes without any coherent pattern. Occasionally a moving blur traveled slowly across them.

Smith made a disgusted sound. He opened the clamps that held the device and picked it up, reaching for the power switch with his other hand. He never touched it. As he moved the device, the ghost images had shifted; they were dancing now with the faint movements of his hand. Smith stared at them without breathing for a moment. Holding the cord, he turned slowly. The ghost images whirled, vanished, reappeared. He turned the other way; they whirled back.

Smith set the device down on the bench with care. His hands were shaking. He had had the thing clamped down on the bench all the time until now. "Christ almighty, how dumb can one man get?" he asked the empty room.

You are six, almost seven, and you are being allowed to use the big viewer for the first time. You are perched on a cushion in the leather chair at the console; your brother, who has been showing you the controls with a bored and superior air, has just left the room, saying, "All right, if you know so much, do it yourself."

In fact, the controls on this machine are unfamiliar; the little viewers you have used all your life have only one knob, for nearer or farther — to move up/down, or left/right, you just point the viewer where you want to see. This machine has dials and little windows with numbers in them, and switches and pushbuttons, most of which you don't understand, but you know they are for special purposes and don't matter. The main control is a metal rod, right in front of you, with a gray plastic knob on the top. The knob is dull from years of handling; it

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feels warm and a little greasy in your hand. The console has a funny electric smell, but the big screen, taller than you are, is silent and dark. You can feel your heart beating against your breastbone. You grip the knob harder, push it forward just a little. The screen lights, and you are drifting across the next room as if on huge silent wheels, chairs and end tables turning into reddish silhouettes that shrink, twist and disappear as you pass through them, and for a moment you feel dizzy because when you notice the red numbers jumping in the console to your left, it is as if the whole house were passing massively and vertiginously through itself; then you are floating out the window with the same slow and steady motion, on across the sunlit pasture where two saddle horses stand with their heads up, sniffing the wind; then a stubbled field, dropping away; and now, below you, the co-op road shines like a silver-gray stream. You press the knob down to get closer, and drop with a giddy swoop; now you are rushing along the road, overtaking and passing a yellow truck, turning the knob to steer. At first you blunder into the dark trees on either side, and once the earth surges up over you in a chaos of writhing red shapes, but now you are learning, and you soar down past the crossroads, up the farther hill, and now, now you are on the big road, flying eastward, passing all the cars, rushing toward the great world where you long to be.

It took Smith six weeks to increase the efficiency of the image intensifier enough to bring up the ghost pictures clearly. When he succeeded, the image on the screen was instantly recognizable. It was a view of Jack McCranie's office; the picture was still dim, but sharp enough that Smith could see the expression on Jack's face. He was leaning back in his chair, hands behind his head. Beside him stood Peg Spatola in a purple dress, with her hand on an open folder. She was talking, and McCranie was listening. That was wrong, because Peg was not supposed to be back from Cleveland until next week.

Smith reached for the phone and punched McCranie's number.

"Yes, Tom?"

"Jack, is Peg in there?"

"Why, no — she's in Cleveland, Tom."

"Oh, yes."

McCranie sounded puzzled. "Is anything the matter?" In the screen, he had swiveled his chair and was talking to Peg, gesturing with short, choppy motions of his arm.

"No, nothing," said Smith. "That's all right, Jack, thank you." He broke the connection. After a

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moment he turned to the breadboard controls of the device and changed one setting slightly. In the screen, Peg turned and walked backward out of the office. When he turned the knob the other way, she repeated these actions in reverse. Smith tinkered with the other controls until he got a view of the calendar on Jack's desk. It was Friday, June 15th — last week.

Smith locked up the device and all his notes, went home and spent the rest of the day thinking.

By the end of July he had refined and miniaturized the device and had extended its sensitivity range into the infrared. He spent most of August, when he should have been on vacation, trying various methods of detecting sound through the device. By focusing on the interior of a speaker's larynx and using infrared, he was able to convert the visible vibrations of the vocal cords into sound of fair quality, but that did not satisfy him. He worked for a while on vibrations picked up from panes of glass in windows and on framed pictures, and he experimented briefly with the diaphragms in speaker systems, intercoms and telephones. He kept on into October without stopping and finally achieved a system that would give tinny but recognizable sound from any vibrating surface — a wall, a floor, even the speaker's own cheek or forehead.

He redesigned the whole device, built a prototype and tested it, tore it down, redesigned, built another. It was Christmas before he was done. Once more he locked up the device and all his plans, drawings and notes.

At home he spent the holidays experimenting with commercial adhesives in various strengths. He applied these to coated paper, let them dry, and cut the paper into rectangles. He numbered these rectangles, pasted them onto letter envelopes, some of which he stacked loose; others he bundled together and secured with rubber bands. He opened the stacks and bundles and examined them at regular intervals. Some of the labels curled up and detached themselves after twenty-six hours without leaving any conspicuous trace. He made up another batch of these, typed his home address on six of them. On each of six envelopes he typed his office address, then covered it with one of the labels. He stamped the envelopes and dropped them into a mailbox. All six, minus their labels, were delivered to the office three days later.

Just after New Year's, he told his partner that he wanted to sell out and retire. They discussed it in general terms.

Using an assumed name and a

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post office box number which was not his, Smith wrote to a commission agent in Boston with whom he had never had any previous dealings. He mailed the letter, with the agent's address covered by one of his labels on which he had typed a fictitious address. The label detached itself in transit; the letter was delivered. When the agent replied, Smith was watching and read the letter as a secretary typed it. The agent followed his instruction to mail his reply in an envelope without return address. The owner of the post office box turned it in marked "not here"; it went to the dead-letter office and was returned in due time, but meanwhile Smith had acknowledged the letter and had mailed, in the same way, a large amount of cash. In subsequent letters he instructed the agent to take bids for components, plans for which he enclosed, from electronics manufacturers, for plastic casings from another, and for assembly and shipping from still another company. Through a second commission agent in New York, to whom he wrote in the same way, he contracted for ten thousand copies of an instruction booklet in four colors.

Late in February he bought a house and an electronics dealership in a small town in the Adirondacks. In March he signed over his interest in the company to his partner, cleaned out his lab and left. He sold his co-op apartment in Manhattan and his summer house in Connecticut, moved to his new home and became anonymous.

You are thirteen, chasing a fox with the big kids for the first time. They have put you in the north field, the worst place, but you know better than to leave it.

"He's in the glen."

"I see him, he's in the brook, going upstream."

You turn the viewer, racing forward through dappled shade, a brilliance of leaves: there is the glen, and now you see the fox, trotting through the shallows, blossoms of bright water at its feet.

"Ken and Nell, you come down ahead of him by the springhouse. Wanda, you and Tim and Jean stay where you are. Everybody else come upstream, but stay back till I tell you."

That's Leigh, the oldest. You turn the viewer, catch a glimpse of Bobby running downhill through the woods, his long hair flying. Then back to the glen: the fox is gone.

"He's heading up past the corncrib!"

"Okay, keep spread out on both sides everybody. Jim, can you and Edie head him off before he gets to the woods?"

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"We'll try. There he is!"

And the chase is going away from you, as you knew it would, but soon you will be older, as old as Nell and Jim; then you will be in the middle of things, and your life will begin.

By trial and error, Smith has found the settings for Dallas, November 22, 1963: Dealey Plaza, 12:25 p.m. He sees the Presidential motorcade making the turn onto Elm Street. Kennedy slumps forward, raising his hands to his throat. Smith presses a button to hold the moment in time. He scans behind the motorcade, finds the sixth floor of the Book Depository Building, finds the window. There is no one behind the barricade of cartons; the room is empty. He scans the nearby rooms, finds nothing. He tries the floor below. At an open window a man kneels, holding a high-powered rifle. Smith photographs him. He returns to the motorcade, watches as the second shot strikes the President. He freezes time again, scans the surrounding buildings, finds a second marksman on a roof, photographs him. Back to the motorcade. A third and fourth shot, the last blowing off the side of the President's head. Smith freezes the action again, finds two gunmen on the grassy knoll, one aiming across the top of a station wagon, one kneeling in the shrubbery. He photographs them. He turns off the power, sits for a moment, then goes to the washroom, kneels beside the toilet and vomits.

The viewer is your babysitter, your television, your telephone (the telephone lines are still up, but they are used only as signaling devices; when you know that somebody wants to talk to you, you focus your viewer on him), your library, your school. Before puberty you watch other people having sex, but even then your curiosity is easily satisfied; after an older cousin initiates you at fourteen, you are much more interested in doing it yourself. The co-op teacher monitors your studies, sometimes makes suggestions, but more and more, as you grow older, leaves you to your own devices. You are intensely interested in African prehistory, in the European theater, and in the ant-civilization of Epsilon Eridani IV. Soon you will have to choose.

New York Harbor, November 4, 1872 — a cold, blustery day. A two-masted ship rides at anchor; on her stern is lettered: MARY CELESTE. Smith advances the time control. A flicker of darkness, light again, and the ship is gone. He turns back again until he finds it standing out under light canvas past Sandy Hook. Manipulating

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time and space controls at once, he follows it eastward through a flickering of storm and sun — loses it, finds it again, counting days as he goes. The farther eastward, the more he has to tilt the device downward, while the image of the ship tilts correspondingly away from him. Because of the angle, he can no longer keep the ship in view from a distance but must track it closely. November 21 and 22, violent storms: the ship is dashed upward by waves, falls again, visible only intermittently; it takes him five hours to pass through two days of real time. The 23rd is calmer, but on the 24th another storm blows up. Smith rubs his eyes, loses the ship, finds it again after a ten-minute search.

The gale blows itself out on the morning of the 26th. The sun is bright, the sea almost dead calm. Smith is able to catch glimpses of figures on deck, tilted above dark cross-sections of the hull. A sailor is splicing a rope in the stern, two others lowering a triangular sail between the foremast and the bowsprit, and a fourth is at the helm. A little group stands leaning on the starboard rail; one of them is a woman. The next glimpse is that of a running figure who advances into the screen and disappears. Now the men are lowering a boat over the side; the rail has been removed and lies on the deck. The men drop into the boat and row away. He hears them shouting to each other but cannot make out the words.

Smith turns to the ship again: the deck is empty. He dips below to look at the hold, filled with casks, then the cabin, then the forecastle. There is no sign of anything wrong — no explosion, no fire, no trace of violence. When he looks up again, he sees the sails flapping, then bellying out full. The sea is rising. He looks for the boat, but now too much time has passed and he cannot find it. He returns to the ship and now reverses the time control, tracks it backward until the men are again in their places on deck. He looks again at the group standing at the rail; now he sees that the woman has a child in her arms. The child struggles, drops over the rail. Smith hears the woman shriek. In a moment she too is over the rail and falling into the sea.

He watches the men running, sees them launch the boat. As they pull away, he is able to keep the focus near enough to see and hear them. One calls, "My God, who's at the helm?" Another, a bearded man with a face gone tallow-pale, replies, "Never mind — row!" They are staring down into the sea. After a moment one looks up, then another. The *Mary Celeste,* with three of the four sails on her

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foremast set, is gliding away, slowly, now faster; now she is gone.

Smith does not run through the scene again to watch the child and her mother drown, but others do.

The production model was ready for shipping in September. It was a simplified version of the prototype, with only two controls, one for space, one for time. The range of the device was limited to one thousand miles. Nowhere on the casing of the device or in the instruction booklet was a patent number or a pending patent mentioned. Smith had called the device Ozo, perhaps because he thought it sounded vaguely Japanese. The booklet described the device as a distant viewer and gave clear, simple instructions for its use. One sentence read cryptically: "Keep Time Control set at zero." It was like "Wet Paint — Do Not Touch."

During the week of September 23, seven thousand Ozos were shipped to domestic and Canadian addresses supplied by Smith: five hundred to electronics manufacturers and suppliers, six thousand, thirty to a carton, marked "On Consignment," to TV outlets in major cities, and the rest to private citizens chosen at random. The instruction booklets were in sealed envelopes packed with each device. Three thousand more went to Europe, South and Central America, and the Middle East.

A few of the outlets which received the cartons opened them the same day, tried the devices out, and put them on sale at prices ranging from $49.95 to $125. By the following day the word was beginning to spread, and by the close of business on the third day every store was sold out. Most people who got them, either through the mail or by purchase, used them to spy on their neighbors and on people in hotels.

In a house in Cleveland, a man watches his brother-in-law in the next room, who is watching his wife getting out of a taxi. She goes into the lobby of an apartment building. The husband watches as she gets into the elevator, rides to the fourth floor. She rings the bell beside the door marked 410. The door opens; a dark-haired man takes her in his arms; they kiss.

The brother-in-law meets him in the hall. "Don't do it, Charlie."

"Get out of my way."

"I'm not going to get out of your way, and I tell you, don't do it. Not now and not later."

"Why the hell shouldn't I?"

"Because if you do I'll kill you. If you want a divorce, OK, get a divorce. But don't lay a hand on her or I'll find you the farthest place you can go."

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Smith got his consignment of Ozos early in the week, took one home and left it to his store manager to put a price on the rest. He did not bother to use the production model but began at once to build another prototype. It had controls calibrated to one-hundredth of a second and one millimeter, and a timer that would allow him to stop a scene, or advance or regress it at any desired rate. He ordered some clockwork from an astronomical supply house.

A high-ranking officer in Army Intelligence, watching the first demonstration of the Ozo in the Pentagon, exclaimed, "My God, with this we could dismantle half the establishment — all we've got to do is launch interceptors when we see them push the button."

"It's a good thing Senator Burkhart can't hear you say that," said another officer. But by the next afternoon everybody had heard it.

A Baptist minister in Louisville led the first mob against an Ozo assembly plant. A month later, while civil and criminal suits against all the rioters were still pending, tapes showing each one of them in compromising or ludicrous activities were widely distributed in the area.

The commission agents who had handled the orders for the first Ozos were found out and had to leave town. Factories were fire-bombed, but others took their place.

The first Ozo was smuggled into the Soviet Union from West Germany by Katerina Belov, a member of a dissident group in Moscow, who used it to document illegal government actions. The device was seized on December 13 by the KGB; Belov and two other members of the group were arrested, imprisoned and tortured. By that time over forty other Ozos were in the hands of dissidents.

You are watching an old movie, *Bob and Ted and Carol and Alice.* The humor seems infantile and unimaginative to you; you are not interested in the actresses' occasional seminudity. What strikes you as hilarious is the coyness, the sidelong glances, smiles, grimaces hinting at things that will never be shown on the screen. You realize that these people have never seen anyone but their most intimate friends without clothing, have never seen any adult shit or piss, and would be embarrassed or disgusted if they did. Why did children say "pee-pee" and "poo-poo," and then giggle? You have read scholarly books about taboos on

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"bodily functions," but why was shitting worse than sneezing?

Cora Zickwolfe, who lived in a remote rural area of Arizona and whose husband commuted to Tucson, arranged with her nearest neighbor, Phyllis Mell, for each of them to keep an Ozo focused on the bulletin board in the other's kitchen. On the bulletin board was a note that said "OK." If there was any trouble and she couldn't get to the phone, she would take down the note, or if she had time, write another.

In April, 1992, about the time her husband usually got home, an intruder broke into the house and seized Mrs. Zickwolfe before she had time to get to the bulletin board. He dragged her into the bedroom and forced her to disrobe. The state troopers got there in fifteen minutes, and Cora never spoke to her friend Phyllis again.

Between 1992 and 2002 more than six hundred improvements and supplements to the Ozo were recorded. The most important of these was the power system created by focusing the Ozo at a narrow aperture on the interior of the Sun. Others included the system of satellite slave units in stationary orbits and a computerized tracer device which would keep the Ozo focused on any subject.

Using the tracer, an entomologist in Mexico City is following the ancestral line of a honey bee. The images bloom and expire, ten every second: the tracer is following each queen back to the egg, then the egg to the queen that laid it, then that queen to the egg. Tens of thousands of generations have passed; in two thousand hours, beginning with a Paleocene bee, he has traveled back into the Cretaceous. He stops at intervals to follow the bee in real time, then accelerates again. The hive is growing smaller, more primitive. Now it is only a cluster of round cells, and the bee is different, more like a wasp. His year's labor is coming to fruition. He watches, forgetting to eat, almost to breathe.

In your mother's study after she dies you find an elaborate chart of her ancestors and your father's. You retrieve the program for it, punch it in, and idly watch a random sampling, back into time, first the female line, then the male...a teacher of biology in Boston, a suffragette, a corn merchant, a singer, a Dutch farmer in New York, a British sailor, a German musician. Their faces glow in the screen, bright-eyed, cheeks flushed with life. Someday you too will be only a series of images in a screen.

Smith is watching the planet

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Mars. The clockwork which turns the Ozo to follow the planet, even when it is below the horizon, makes it possible for him to focus instantly on the surface, but he never does this. He takes up his position hundreds of thousands of miles away, then slowly approaches, in order to see the red spark grow to a disk, then to a yellow sunlit ball hanging in darkness. Now he can make out the surface features: Syrtis Major and Thoth-Nepenthes leading in a long gooseneck to Utopia and the frostcap.

The image as it swells hypnotically toward him is clear and sharp, without tremor or atmospheric distortion. It is summer in the northern hemisphere: Utopia is wide and dark. The planet fills the screen, and now he turns northward, over the cratered desert still hundreds of miles distant. A dust storm, like a yellow veil, obscures the curved neck of Thoth-Nepenthes; then he is beyond it, drifting down to the edge of the frostcap. The limb of the planet reappears; he floats like a glider over the dark surface tinted with rose and violet-gray; now he can see its nubbly texture; now he can make out individual plants. He is drifting among their gnarled gray stems, their leaves of violet horn; he sees the curious misshapen growths that may be air bladders or some grotesque analogue of blossoms.

Harper & Row is proud to be publishers of **Damon Knight's ORBIT 18,** the 18th volume in one of the oldest and finest series of original science fiction and fantasy stories and his forthcoming book, **TURNING POINTS,** a critical analysis of Science Fiction (coming in February).

Harper & Row, Publishers
10 East 53d Street
New York, N.Y. 10022

Now, at the edge of the screen, something black and spindling leaps. He follows it instantly, finds it, brings it hugely magnified into the center of the screen: a thing like a hairy beetle, its body covered with thick black hairs or spines; it stands on six jointed legs, waving its antennae, its mouth parts busy. And its four bright eyes stare into his, across forty million miles.

Smith's hair got whiter and thinner. Before the 1992 Crash, he made heavy contributions to the International Red Cross and to volunteer organizations in Europe,

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Asia and Africa. He got drunk periodically, but always alone. From 1993 to 1996 he stopped reading the newspapers.

He wrote down the coordinates for the plane crash in which his daughter and her husband had died, but never used them.

At intervals while dressing or looking into the bathroom mirror, he stared as if into an invisible camera and raised one finger. In his last years he wrote some poems.

We know his name. Patient researchers, using advanced scanning techniques, followed his letters back through the postal system and found him, but by that time he was safely dead.

The whole world has been at peace for more than a generation. Crime is almost unheard of. Free energy has made the world rich, but the population is stable, even though early detection has wiped out most diseases. Everyone can do whatever he likes, providing his neighbors would not disapprove, and after all, their views are the same as his own.

You are forty, a respected scholar, taking a few days out to review your life, as many people do at your age. You have watched your mother and father coupling on the night they conceived you, watched yourself growing in her womb, first a red tadpole, then a thing like an embryo chicken, then a big-headed baby kicking and squirming. You have seen yourself delivered, seen the first moment when your bloody head broke into the light. You have seen yourself staggering about the nursery in rompers, clutching a yellow plastic duck. Now you are watching yourself hiding behind the fallen tree on the hill, and you realize that there are no secret places. And beyond you in the ghostly future you know that someone is watching you as you watch; and beyond that watcher another, and beyond that another... Forever.

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The subject of F&SF's first special issue (September 1962) was, of course, Theodore Sturgeon, who here returns to give us a special and affectionate insight into Damon Knight and his work.

Damon: An Appreciation

by THEODORE STURGEON

In his introduction to *A Science Fiction Argosy* (of which more later) Damon Knight explains his choices for that remarkable anthology by writing that "they have the qualities that make for lasting pleasure."

With those words he describes Damon Knight.

Were he to be described in just one word — the man himself, his teaching, his own writing, and his astonishing skill as editor and anthologist — the word would have to be a clumsy one: *culturedness* — regrettably, for there was never anything clumsy about him.

Damon Knight was bitten to the marrow by science fiction as a boy in Hood River, Oregon. I have no idea who bit him, nor how it could have happened where it did, for Hood River, like most of America at the time, was hardly a mother lode of sf. The youngster read the three current sf magazines and everything he could borrow or order from libraries, which was little enough. He sent to England for Olaf Stapledon novels, and for all his obsessive efforts, it took quite a while to fill a shelf as long as his arm.

I have a theory that difficulties which quell and quench most of us serve only to strengthen the big ones; that FDR, for example, would never have become President had he not been stricken with polio. I am almost certain that sf is not a disease, and I know of no lethal cases, but there is no doubt that for certain susceptible people it is progressive and incurable. In such cases it is useless to attempt control or prevention. The subject will devise means to achieve his

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satisfaction, persistently and resourcefully defying all obstacles; if he is absolutely denied his "fix," he may begin to make his own, sometimes of a high degree of purity. Ultimately he may become a carrier, infecting all about him including even resistant types who denounce sf, say they never read it or look at it, and flock to *Lord of the Flies, The Six Million Dollar Man,* and Kurt Vonnegut "instead." For an unfortunately large fraction of the reading/viewing public (and it's their misfortune, not ours) shuns sf which calls itself sf, equating it with zap-guns and bug-eyed monsters, and appreciates only sf which does not admit it is sf, like *On the Beach* or Nabokov's *Ada.* If you know one of these benighted and self-denying souls and like him well enough to inoculate him into visions so limitless as to be rivaled only by poetry, then fill your needle with Damon Knight. After an initial period of disorientation ("I didn't know sf could be like *this!*") he will settle into pursuit and perusal of Knight's prose, always graceful, sometimes powerful, even harsh, sometimes staccato and swift, sometimes lulling and cadenced, always exhibiting that deftness and sureness which assures that reader that he is in good hands.

Let me disclose a secret known only to a few writers, and possibly only to a minority even of those few: One can get an impressive amount of literary stature by developing and refining a style, which, if coupled with a good sense of story, can make one famous indeed. One also runs the risk of being imitable. Anyone with competence in words and a good "ear" can write a paragraph of pure Hemingway or Hammett or Steinbeck. (A paragraph, I said, not a story or a novel.) But I defy anyone to do the same with Samuel R. Delany or Edgar Pangborn — or Damon Knight. This is because these writers have mastered, not a style, but *styles.* They can change the texture of their prose at will, matching mood and scene, atmosphere and pace, and often it seems that, if the story were printed on cotton, halfway down the page it turned to silk . . . or to burlap. And the rival writer, awed and more than a little jealous, puzzles and parses, dissects and debates, wondering how in the hell it was done; and most of the time never finds out.

The same sort of thing can be said of Knight's choice of theme and subject, length and structure, and the penalty for this degree of virtuosity is that he writes, from time to time, stories that you are just not going to like. You may be sure, however, that other people, whole big bunches of them, are

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going to disagree with you. A perfect example is his clever *To Serve Man*. My, what nasty things some people say against that poor defenseless little story! And yet a good many who say they hate it say so because they like it — the same mechanism which produces groans and angry howls at the advent of a really good pun. On the other hand, I have yet to meet a reader who was not taken by the lapidary *Not With a Bang*, that terribly funny, quiet explosion of pathos and despair.

You have the Knight bibliography, and impressive as it is, it describes only a part of this man's worth and work. His critical comments, the prefaces and rubrics in other people's anthologies and in the fan press, his letters of rejection, and his personal correspondence; his teaching, lecturing, participation in panel discussions and seminars; and his long record of performance in and for the Science Fiction Writers of America, the "Clarion" courses, and the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conferences — all follow the same thrust. The man loves his field and will do anything he can — anything — to promote and improve it.

An extended exposure to Damon Knight produces two astonishments — two kinds of astonishment. One derives from the apparent ease with which he does the many things he does. His ability to choose words with fitness and precision, his quick responses to difficult and troublesome questions and demands, the coolness and clarity with which he expresses even his more passionate convictions, all flow from him with a millrace smoothness and control. Well, "It takes work to eliminate the traces of work," as Michelangelo once remarked. Damon is, above all, human, and therefore must present some blowtop moments. All I can say is that in the thirty years I have known him, I have never witnessed one.

The other astonishment, mixed with delighted anticipation, lies in his ability to use his tools. His resourcefulness and inventiveness with words is, of course, total, but his armamentarium contains other instruments. Sometimes, following a pungent title, he simply quotes without comment:

> *Yank Spoken Here* (*American Places and People, as Seen by British Novelists*)
> The gas-pipe withdrew to its hook. A cash-drawer shot out of the side of the pump within easy reach of him. But he was so intent on the patrolman that at first he didn't notice, and the attendant had to parp on his hooter.
>
> —*The Wrong End of Time*
> by John Brunner

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"To the pigs?" Danty said with a cynical grin. "Man, I should die laughing the day the pigs do anything for me! More like, they'd give Josh a medal."

—*Ibid.*

Having collected food and coffee from the counter, they sat down around a table isolated in the centre of the room and Danty produced a stack of paper serviettes.

—*Ibid.*

Make him president of some university and fix him a medal, that should be enough.

"Well, Mr. President, have you fixed an activation date?"

"Yes. It has got to be handled right. Played properly, it'll fix the cold war as well as any variety of hot."

—*Colossus* by D.F. Jones

"Johnson, please fix a meeting of Group A for 1530, here — OK?"

—*Ibid.*

"Angela, I've called a Group A meeting for 1530 — Johnson is fixing it."

Forty was a good age to get fixed. . . .

—*Ibid.*

It showed a man sitting on a lavatory, clearly much concerned with his own affairs. The caption said, "The only man in Washington who knows what he is doing."

—*Ibid.*

"OK, Forbin. But if that's so, how come I have just had a blast from the chairman of the USSR, accusing me — us — of attempting to seduce Guardian with phony maths?"

—*Ibid.*

"Yes, I know, both running high-grade maths without repeats, you want help."

—*Ibid.*

"We have six top-grade maths men in the Group; they should be able to hold it down."

—*Ibid.*

"OK, Forbin, I know how you feel, but the old man did not mean to hurt your pride, the way he was fixed —"

"What in tarnation has pride to do with it?" Forbin looked genuinely puzzled. "Really, you people here are so far from reality."

—*Ibid.*

It stiffened the aide wonderfully, and brought the Chief of Staff back from a deep contemplation of the unspeakable that not even his professional Red Indian face could entirely conceal.

—*Ibid.*

Forbin thought of the bottle of rye he knew Blake kept in his desk drawer, in open defiance of the Admin Standing orders. He got it out, found a couple of plastic mugs, and poured two fair-sized tots.

—*Ibid.*

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"Yes," agreed Forbin, "we talk in English, but there are differences. I naturally assumed you would have an American accent."

"It was an unreasonable assumption," Colossus said. "It is proper to speak a language with the accent of its native users."

—*Ibid.*

The above are from *Orbit 14*, under the overall title *The Memory Machine*. And if there is any reader present who comes from a hinterland (Hood River, mayhap?) so remote that he doesn't know *Orbit*, let him be advised that it is the leading anthology of original science fiction, pays well, comes out at least once a year, and sometimes twice, in hard covers and then goes to paperback, repeatedly discovers and always encourages good new talent, earns the scorn of many hard-core shellbacks who growl that much or most of it ain't sf, which is because Damon follows his own definition of the genre — the only one ever made that doesn't leak: "Sf is whatever you happen to be pointing at when you're talking about it." To growl they're entitled; anyone's taste can call any story a bad story; but, by golly, I bet nobody ever found a badly *written* story in *Orbit*.

But back to Damon's astonishing inventiveness in commentary. His *A Pocketful of Stars* is an anthology of stories written by attendees to the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference, of which Knight was co-founder and perennial mainstay. It contains 19 very fine stories indeed, written by some of the best writers there are — old hands and new discoveries. Each is prefaced by its author, who describes his or her Milford experience. Knight's introduction gives a terse history of the Conference, and ends:

> . . . I now turn you over to the authors, who will introduce their work with occasional interruptions from me. To save a lot of footnotes, though, I have put certain parts of these introductions within brackets [thus]. When you see these brackets, you are to understand that I am saying, "Don't take this too seriously," or, more briefly, "Nonsense."

His use of this simple device is deft and devastating. If you stop to think about it, or if you are Damon Knight, you can accomplish miracles of communication with a microminiaturized device like this. For example, one writer gave an involuted explanation of the birth of his story and its inspiration in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." See the precision with which Damon reacts and responds:

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> I...saw that the ending was missing. The ending in my story was implicit all the time, but I hadn't seen it because ["Big Two-Hearted River" had no ending.] As soon as I wrote the ...scene at the end, the story sold.

In two cases Damon put his brackets around the writer's entire statement — once because of a very nice person's excessive modesty, and again because of the exact opposite, multiplied. It's an amazing lesson about how very little needs to be said about anything, ever, if you have a way to isolate the soft or hollow or foreign bodies accurately and a couple of stainless brackets to tweeze them out with. The absolute peak of efficiency and economy is reached where one writer, in the course of deriding the whole idea of writing an introduction to his story (see how many words it takes to explain all this?) takes a few jovial swings at another writer who had previously stomped out of the Conference mad. See how neatly Damon informs us that the man could not have been all that mad, because he returned to a subsequent Conference:

> . . . what if my favorite [ex-]Milfordian started writing serious introductions to his side-splitting self-parodies instead of using the space to take pot-shots at the latest of a long string of wives and ex-girl friends?

Precision of wit is by no means the peak of Damon Knight's performances. He happens to be a superb teacher, as the remarkable students of that remarkable "Clarion" writing course will affirm. (The quotes around "Clarion" indicate that the course, initiated by Robin Scott Wilson in little Clarion College in Pennsylvania, has moved, first to Tulane and more recently to Michigan State.) For six weeks, with a recognized science fiction writer teaching one week each, and Damon and his talented and sensitive wife Kate Wilhelm together for the final two, those Clarion kids *work*. I have never seen any group work with such dedication. They write at night and in the daytime, they write instead of eating, and when they're not writing they're in class. The last I heard, some 23 to 25 percent of Clarion alumni are selling writers, a startling score; and a great deal of that has to do with Damon and Kate, who have had the job of collating and consolidating the input.

But you don't have to go to Michigan to have Damon teach you. There is a remarkable book — it has my very highest recommendation, called *Those Who Can — A Science Fiction Reader* (Mentor, New American Library, New York, $1.50), edited by Robin Scott Wilson, in which a group of very

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fine sf writers discuss plot, character, theme, setting, and point of view, and present their own stories to illustrate and demonstrate these matters. And trust Damon Knight to come up with some new angle, something ingeniously done, not because it's new and ingenious, but because it adds force and point and explicitness to the teaching process. His story is the magnificent "Masks," first published in *Playboy,* and he has had it printed only on the right-hand pages of the book, with his annotations on the left. You can read the story through and then go back and find out, as each element of the story appears, where it came from, why it's there, and how it evolved into what it is. At this writing I happen to be teaching a course (at UCLA) on the very advanced aspects of writing, and I find the book, and especially Damon's contribution, invaluable.

I mentioned earlier one truly remarkable book from this master anthologist: *A Science Fiction Argosy* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 828 pp., $9.95). A little wearily I must make a disclaimer: I am *not* making much of this book because it happens to have one of my works in it. Time and again, during my years as a book columnist, I had to deal with the problem of books with my stories in them. I could review the book without mentioning my part in it, or make this kind of disclaimer, or simply ignore the book — and all its other authors — altogether. I confess to having done all these things at one time or another, with some anger that it has to come as a confession at all; but this time, the hell with it. I am not going to deprive you of learning about this book for extraneous sensibilities. Just take my word for it that I'm here just now on Damon Knight's behalf, and not my own. And I do hope and pray that the book is still in print, or that you can find it in a library. It isn't new, but then neither is Mount Rainier. Publication date was 1972. Lots of luck. Now I'll let the table of contents speak for the book, and for Damon Knight's instinct for balance and shapeliness:

Book One: "Green Thoughts," by John Collier. "The Red Queen's Race," by Isaac Asimov. "The Cure," by Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore. "An Ornament to His Profession," by Charles L. Harness. "The Third Level," by Jack Finney. "One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts," by Shirley Jackson. "Bernie the Faust," by William Tenn. "Light of Other Days," by Bob Shaw. "The Game of Rat and Dragon," by Cordwainer Smith. "Becalmed in Hell," by Larry Niven. "Apology to Inky," by

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Robert M. Green, Jr. *The Demolished Man,* by Alfred Bester. Book Two: "Day Million," by Frederik Pohl. "Manna," by Peter Phillips. "Can You Feel Anything When I Do This?" by Robert Sheckley. "Somerset Dreams," by Kate Wilhelm. "He Walked Around the Horses," by H. Beam Piper. "Rump-Titty-Titty-Tum-*Tah*-Tee," by Fritz Leiber. "Sea Wrack," by Edward Jesby. "Man in his Time," by Brian Aldiss. "Four Brands of Impossible," by Norman Kagan. "Built Up Logically," by Howard Schoenfeld. "Judgement Day," by L. Sprague de Camp. "Journey's End," by Poul Anderson. *More Than Human,* by Theodore Sturgeon.

And now a few words from Damon Knight.

On "Theme":

Theme, if such a thing exists, is the spirit of a story, its ghost, which can be separated from the story only at the cost of the patient's life . . . an academic shibboleth, an imaginary entity that is read into a work by the teacher in order that the student may be required to read it out. . . In the academic sense, *viz., the meaning of a work of art reduced to a single phrase or sentence,* the theme... of any work of art is: "Life is like this." But to expand the meaning of "this" requires the whole story.

—in *Those Who Can.*

On Robert Heinlein:

Unlike most modern novelists, he has no patience with the unskilled and incompetent. Those who contribute most to the world, Heinlein thinks, are also those who have the most fun. Those who contribute nothing are objects of pity; and pity for the self-pitying is not high on Heinlein's list of virtues.

This tough-mindedness is an altogether different thing from the cynicism of other writers. Heinlein is a moralist to the core; he devoutly believes in courage, honor, self-discipline, self-sacrifice for love or duty. Above all, he is a libertarian. "When any government, or any church for that matter, undertakes to say to its subjects 'This you may not read, this you must not see, this you are forbidden to know,' the end result is tyranny and oppression, no matter how holy the motives. Mighty little force is needed to control a man whose mind has been hoodwinked; contrariwise, no amount of force can control a free man, a man whose mind is free. No, not the rack, not fission bombs, not anything — you can't conquer a free man; the most you can do is kill him."

—in *The Past Through Tomorrow*

On Science Fiction:

. . . although many of the old ideas of science fiction turn up in new guises, that's not what is

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important. The significant difference is one of attitude. The sf of the late '20s was full of wonderful gadgets, because it seemed then that technology might save us, and any hope was better than none. Today we have seen what the unrestrained technological exploitation of our planet can do to us, and we realize more and more as each day passes that our only hope lies in ourselves. Science fiction is turning inward . . . not in despair, as the old guard would have it, but because that's where the action is.

—in *Clarion II*

Thus Damon Knight: writer, editor, anthologist, critic, teacher; tender and tough, urbane and decisive, who gives a damn for the earth and for the soul. He has an impish cleverness and the gift of laughter and a way, sometimes, of telling terror-tales by holding up a mirror for us to look at. I'm glad he was born, and grateful.

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Doorway to Kal-Jmar-a, *Planet Stories*, Nov-44
The Third Little Green Man, *Planet Stories*, July-48
Tiger Ride-b, *Astounding*, Oct-48
No Winter, No Summer-c, *Thrilling Wonder*, Oct-48
The Weakness of Rvog-b, *Thrilling Wonder*, Feb-49
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Gravity Trap, *Super Science*, July-49
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The Earth Quarter, *If*, Jan-55
Dulcie and Decorum, *Galaxy*, Mar-55
You're Another, *Fantasy & SF*, June-55, A
The Country of the Kind, *Fantasy & SF*, Feb-56, B
This Way to the Regress-d, *Galaxy*, Aug-56, D
The Beach Where Time Began-e, *Infinity*, Aug-56, A
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Thing of Beauty, *Galaxy*, Sept-58, A
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What Rough Beast?, *Fantasy & SF*, Feb-59, C
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The Second-Class Citizen, *If*, Nov-63, C
The Big Pat Boom, *Galaxy*, Dec-63, D
An Ancient Madness-f, *Galaxy*, June-64, D
Satisfaction-k, *Analog*, Aug-64, D
Maid to Measure, *Fantasy & SF*, Oct-64, D
God's Nose, *Rogue*, -64, C
To the Pure, *Dapper*, Apr-65
Shall the Dust Praise Thee?, *Dangerous Visions*, -67
The World and Thorinn, *Galaxy*, Apr-68
The Gardens of Ease, *Galaxy*, June-68
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The Star Below, *Galaxy*, Aug-68
Truly Human, *Galaxy*, Oct-69
On the Wheel, *Nova 2*, May-72
Down There, *New Dimensions 3*, Oct-73
I See You, *Fantasy & SF*, Nov-76

Notes

a - As Stuart Fleming.
b - With James Blish.
c - As Donald Laverty (with James Blish).
d - Collected as "Backward, O Time."

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e - Collected as "Extempore."
f - With Kenneth Bulmer.
g - As "The Dying Man."
h - As "Collector's Item."
j - As "Mary."
k - As "Semper Fi."

Key to Collections

A - Far Out (1961)
B - In Deep (1963)
C - Off Center (1965)
D - Turning On (1966)
E - Three Novels (1967)

COLLECTIONS

Far Out — Simon & Schuster, 1961. Includes To Serve Man/Idiot Stick/Thing of Beauty/The Enemy/Not with a Bang/Babel II/Anachron/Special Delivery/You're Another/Time Enough/Extempore/Cabin Boy/The Last Word.

In Deep — Berkley in 1963. Includes Four in One/An Eye for a What?/The Handler/Stranger Station/Ask Me Anything/The Country of the Kind/Ticket to Anywhere/Beachcomber.

Off Center — Ace Books 1965. Ace Double with author/s novel *The Rithian Terror.* Includes What Rough Beast?/The Second-Class Citizen/Be My Guest/God's Nose/Catch That Martian.

Turning On — Doubleday 1966. Includes Semper Fi/The Big Pat Boom/Man in the Jar/Mary/Auto-da-fe-/To the Pure/Eripmav/Backward, O Time/The Night of Lies/Maid to Measure/Collector's Item/A Likely Story/Don't Live in the Past/

Three Novels — Doubleday 1967. Includes Rule Golden/Natural State/The Dying Man.

Two Science Fiction Novels — Lancer Books. Includes World Without Children/The Earth Quarter.

The Best of Damon Knight — Pocket Books 1976.

NOVELS

Hell's Pavement — Lion Library in 1955, (Reprinted by Berkley 1962, as *Analogue Men.*)

A for Anything — Zenith Books 1959, (Reprinted by Berkley in 1965 as *The People Maker.*)

Masters of Evolution — (Originally in *Galaxy* as "Natural State.") Published by Ace Books in 1959, as an Ace Double with George O. Smith's *Fire in the Heavens.* (Collected in *Three Novels.*)

The Sun Saboteurs—(Originally in *If* 1955, as "The Earth Quarter.") Published by Ace Books in 1961, as an Ace Doubke with G. McDonald Wallis *The Light of Lilith.* (Collected in *Two Science Fiction Novels.*)

Beyond the Barrier — (Originally in *F&SF* 1963-64, as "The Tree of Time"), Doubleday 1964.

Mind Switch — (Originally in *Galaxy* in 1963 as "The Visitor at the Zoo.") Berkley 1965, (Reprinted MacFadden-Bartell in 1971 as *The Other Foot.*)

The Rithian Terror — (Originally in *Startling Stories* in 1953, as "Double Meaning.") Ace Books 1965, as an Ace Double with author's collection *Off Center.*

DAMON KNIGHT AS EDITOR

Editor Dec. 1950-Feb. 1951 *Worlds Beyond.*
Editor *If* -Feb 1959.
1962 *A Century of SF*
Editor 1963, *Now Begins Tomorrow*
1964 *A Century of Great Short Science Fiction Novels,* Delacourte.
1964 *Tomorrow x 4,* Gold Medal.
1965 *The Dark Side,* Doubleday.
1965 *Beyond Tomorrow,* Harpers.
1966 *Cities of Wonder,* Doubleday.
1966 *Orbit 1,* Berkley.
1966 *Nebula Award Stories 1965,* Doubleday.
1967 *Orbit 2,* Berkley.
1967 *Science Fiction Inventions,* Lancer.
1967 *Worlds to Come,* Harper.
1968 *Orbit 3,* Putnam.
1968 *A Hundred Years of Science Fiction,* Simon & Schuster.
1968 *The Metal Smile,* Belmont.
1968 *Toward Infinity,* Simon & Schuster.
1968 *Orbit 4,* Putnam.
1969 *Orbit 5,* Putnam.
1969 *Orbit 6,* Putnam.
1970 *Dimension X,* Simon & Schuster.

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VINTAGE BOOKS
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1970 *Orbit 7*, Putnam.
1970 *Orbit 8*, Putnam.
1971 *First Contract*, Pinnacle.
1971 *A Pocketful of Stars*.
1971 *Orbit 9*, Putnam.
1972 *Perchance To Dream*, Manor.
1972 *A Science Fiction Argosy*, Simon & Schuster.
1972 *Orbit 10*, Putnam.
1972 *Orbit 11*, Putnam.
1973 *The Golden Road*, Simon & Schuster.
1973 *Tomorrow & Tomorrow*, Harper.
1973 *Orbit 12*, Putnam.
1974 *Orbit 13*, Putnam.
1974 *A Shocking Thing*, Pocket Books.
1974 *Happy Endings*, Bobbs Merrill.
1974 *Orbit 14*, Harper.
1974 *Orbit 15*, Harper.
1975 *Science Fiction of The Thirties*, Bobbs Merrill.
1975 *Best Stories from Orbit Vol. 1-10*, Putnam.
1975 *Orbit 16-17*, Harper
1976 *Orbit 18*, Harper.

TRANSLATIONS
1967 *Ashes, Ashes* by Rene Barajavel.
1965 *13 French Science Fiction Stories*, Bantam.

Non-fiction
1956 *In Search of Wonder*, Advent.
1967 *In Search of Wonder, (50% new material)*, Advent.
1970 *Charles Fort, Prophet of the Unexplained*, Doubleday.

Damon Knight's other Non-fiction includes such articles as *A Yardstick For Science Fiction*, and his short pieces for the "Clarion" series and introductions for Heinlein's "Future History" Series. As for listing these pieces I do not feel that my research is complete enough to be authoritative.

Films.
To Serve Man, presented on "The Twilight Zone" screen play by Rod Serling.
The Early History of Science Fiction, written by and featuring Damon Knight.

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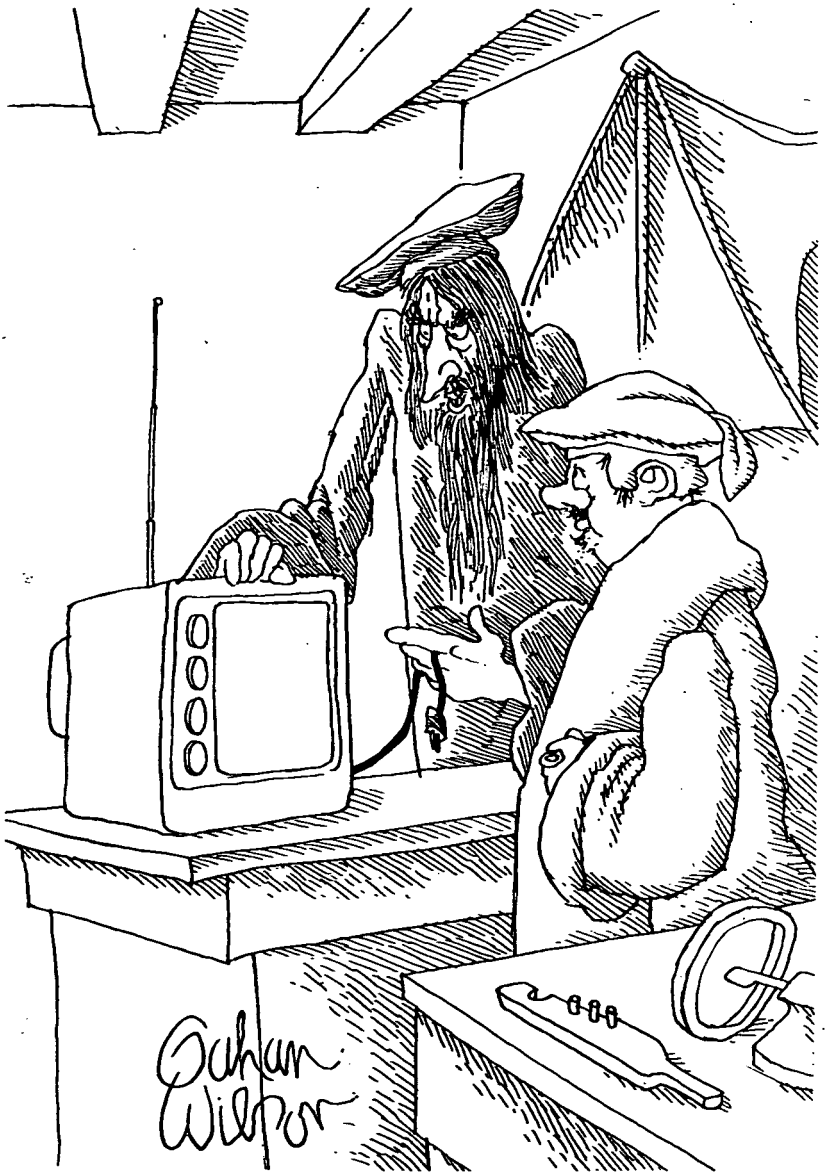

"...but then I realized in order to make it work I'd have to invent a socket and God knows what else."

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DAMON KNIGHT WORD-WISE

by John Grabowski

In the puzzle below are hidden the names of 29 things associated with Damon Knight. Use the clues to identify the words, and enter them on the line next to the clue as you find them. When all the words are filled in, the first letters will spell out something pertaining to the inimitable Mr. Knight.

I N D E E P N E T A L S N A R T

T N R O X D T V R B Q C P H M O

I H V R H G U O N E E A M C P S

C D U E T W I L H E L M T R L E

K W A G N H F U Z H U B O A P R

E T L R O T G T T Z R N I E E V

T R C E G Y I I H K O T D S K E

K O V S E S W O N G A C I N Z M

A F M S R T L N N F S L J I G A

E S D R O F L I M S I J J L A N

T E Z N G L N T V E C N D M L W

I L C L A R I O N E I V I E A Q

L R S H U B K C T S D P X T X R

F A B T R S E U G O L A N A Y L

R H J O C R G M U R I T H I A N

U C D E L I V E R Y Y N E Y O F

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_ _ _ _ _ _ - "_____ Pawn" (1942)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - HELL'S PAVEMENT was adapted from "The _____" (1952)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ - DK co-founded The _____ Science Fiction Writers' Conference with Judith Merril.

_ _ _ _ _ _ - DK's birthplace.

_ _ _ _ _ - "The _____ Express" (1957)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ - "Doorway to _____" (1944)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ - "_____ A Bang" (1950) [2 words]

_ _ _ _ _ _ - 1963 Berkley collection of DK. [2 words]

_ _ _ _ _ _ - Magazine which has published over 20 stories by DK.

_ _ _ _ - Award DK received for his book reviews in 1956.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - 1966 collection of DK. [2 words]

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - DK's wife, Kate _____.

_ _ _ _ _ - "_____ Golden" (1954)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - _____ OF WONDER, DK collection of critical essays on science fiction (1956) [2 words]

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - What DK did to ASHES, ASHES by Rene Barjavel (1967)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - MASTERS OF _____ (1959)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - First DK published story (1941)

_ _ _ _ _ _ - "Time _____" (1960)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - "Special _____" (1954)

_ _ _ _ _ _ - "_____ Stick" (1958)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - DK story adapted by Rod Serling for The Twilight Zone (1950) [3 words]

_ _ _ _ _ _ - Leading original SF anthology series edited by DK.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ - "This Way to the _____" (1956)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - Subject of non-fiction book by DK (1970) [2 words]

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ - THE _____ TERROR (1965)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - SCIENCE FICTION _____ edited by DK (1967)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ - "_____ to Anywhere" (1052)

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - TOWARD _____, 1968 book edited by DK.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ - SF writing course taught by DK, initiated by Robin Scott Wilson.

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Russell Kirk is a well known writer on conservative thought and educational theory. Dr. Kirk also writes supernatural fantasy and does it very well indeed. We're pleased to offer his first story here since 1967 ("Balgrummo's Hell").

Saviourgate

by RUSSELL KIRK

"This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
—Every nighte and alle,
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule."

—A Lyke-Wake Dirge

This old street, scarcely wider than a lane, could not be long; at the far end of it there loomed the Norman tower of a parish church. Mark Findlay had a notion that if he were to hurry the length of the street and turn to the right beyond the church, he might reach a modern square with movie houses and a taxi stand. Needing to catch the midnight train for London, he must find a cab soon.

And, his cough growing worse, he must get out of the wet. In Northminster, this Christmas Eve, a light snow had fallen and then melted, lingering as fog. Between trains he had strolled the streets for nearly three hours, his head so filled with worries that he scarcely had noticed anything he passed. Looking back the way he had come, and coughing hard, he saw by the great clock on the cathedral tower that it was nearly half-past eleven. In more ways than one, he had lost his sense of direction; he was uncertain what way the railway station lay.

This was a charming narrow street of Georgian houses, or perhaps some of them from Queen Anne's time, two or three little whitewashed steps going up to each door — that he could make out through the low-lying chilly mist. There seemed to be no storefronts, and only one hanging signboard, a few yards directly in front of him, visible by gaslight (this being, perhaps, the only lane in Northminster still lit by gas lamps):

The Crosskeys
Paul Marriner, Resident Manager

About this gilt lettering was the

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well-painted symbol of two crossed keys. Decades ago, had he glimpsed this street sometime? He had been in Northminster only once before, early in the war: much of the town had been uglified since then, but this street — supposing it to be the same street — looked unchanged. Had he seen that pub sign before?

As he lingered on the corner, coughing ferociously, a clergyman brushed past him in the dim light. "Could you tell me..." Findlay began, but the parson hurried on, umbrella over his head. Perhaps he had taken Findlay for a tramp, what with his cough, his pale face, and his mud-splashed coat. Someone else, looking rather like a civil servant, was striding in the opposite direction on the other side of the street.

"I'm sorry, but could you help me?" Findlay called to him. A smug face was turned toward him briefly, but there was no slackening of pace, and the second man went round the corner.

Somewhere he must get directions. Should he go a few paces down that street, ring the bell for the porter — if there might be a night porter at a small hotel of this sort, nowadays — and ask his way to a cab stand or to the station? He hesitated; for the past several months, he had evaded most decisions, big or small.

Yes, he had best try the Crosskeys. The stained-glass windows were alight in that church at the far end, Findlay noticed as he made his way past the Georgian doors, and a bell was tolling from the tower. Just as he was about to mount the stone steps, another coughing fit racked him. Bent and hacking, he leaned against the bow front of the Crosskeys.

Then the hotel door opened, and down the steps to him came a lean man. "That's a graveyard cough," the man said, sympathetically. "I could hear you in the parlor. 'It wasn't the cough that carried him off, but the coffin they carried him off in.' Do come in for a whiskey."

Startled, Findlay contrived to gasp, "I need to catch a train." The man had taken his arm: a forceful tall man with a whimsical handsome face.

"Hacking like that, you'd never reach the station," this stranger — or was he quite a stranger? — told him. "I'll see that you make your train, if you must." He held open the heavy door. Within, the corridor was warm and colorful, with dark oak wainscoting and good framed prints on the walls.

"But it's after hours," Findlay protested.

"Oh, the public bar is closed, but at the Crosskeys they always can serve something to a bona fide

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traveler like you." The man was briskly helping him off with his muddy coat. "Come into the residents' parlor. I've put up for the night, and the manager knows me."

"I don't think that there's time," Findlay muttered as he was propelled into the parlor. This insistent host, who seemed tolerably sober, spoke like an educated man and behaved like an officer.

"Time!" The lean man chuckled. "'It's time, gentlemen, time!' That's no problem for you and me, is it? I say, you're a Canadian, aren't you? I know you. You're Findlay, Mark Findlay. I was thinking of you — coincidence, I'd have said once — before I heard that cough of yours in the street."

Findlay stared into that confident face. Had he known this man? A certain recklessness made those bold features memorable. Perhaps this man had been a soldier. To Findlay came some faint memory of an hour's tipsy talk, a curious conversation, with a man who had looked rather like this, long ago. Some chance acquaintance, but encountered where?

"Did we meet — why, right here, in '39?" Findlay inquired. "I'm sorry, but I don't recall your name."

"I'm Ralph Bain. Of course it's here. Take that chair, the leather one, Findlay Jimmie!"

A corpulent, florid-faced porter or waiter, in scarlet jacket and brass buttons, ambled toward them. "Whiskey and sodas, Jimmie," Bain ordered, "and put more coals on that fire. You remember Mr. Findlay, Jimmie. He's passing through Northminster — unless, after all, we can persuade him to take a room. Anyhow, he's bona fide."

"It's your sort that makes this job a pleasure, Mr. Findlay, sir," said Jimmie. Jimmie was an Irishman. The fire blazed up on the broad hearth below the Adam chimneypiece; the whiskey glasses came promptly on a heavy silver tray. Findlay had ceased to cough. Surely this was the jolly hotel of his dim memory, with the faded upholstery or shiny leather of its easy chairs, the green draperies of its tall windows, the solid dark furniture of yesteryear, the big Oriental rug a trifle frayed, and especially that massive-framed painting of the Highland cattle. Now he even recalled the looming silver tea urn on the mahogany sideboard.

A few people still sat in this residents' parlor, perhaps waiting for the midnight peal from the cathedral's bells. Several of them had nodded to him, or smiled at him, when Bain almost had forced him into an armchair, and an old

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lady had said "Good evening." Could he have seen her before, and perhaps the granddaughter or girl companion beside her? Ralph Bain he did recollect fairly well, by this time: rather a wag, this Bain, he recalled, with a talent for telling stories that seemed tall. They had taken to each other, he and Bain, when in that year so long vanished they had happened to fall into talk in this very pub. The Bain of Findlay's memory had seemed no younger than the man who sat opposite him now: his host must be remarkably preserved, not a gray hair to his head. Did he dye?

Bain had been chatting with him lightly for several minutes, but Findlay — needing to catch that train and fretting about tomorrow's hard decisive conference — scarcely had paid attention. What a heartening room this was, everyone in it good-natured and healthy-looking! The sound of the ancient church bell penetrated through the thick drapes of the bow front; yes, it was a single bell tolling, not a peal. At any moment, Findlay feared, the tolling might be mingled with the chimes of the cathedral clock sounding the third quarter of the hour — which would mean that he'd have a narrow squeak to make his train, even though the trains generally ran late or lingered at the platform.

Bain noticed that his guest was listening to the bell. "That's a good sound, isn't it, Findlay? Lord knows when that church commenced the custom. There was a Saxon or Danish church on the site, you know. The day before Christmas, from time out of mind, they've tolled that bell from early morning to midnight, one stroke for every year since the Nativity. The church is our friend Canon Hoodman's, you remember, besides his being chapter treasurer. They must be coming close to stroke one thousand, nine hundred, and thirty-nine. Shall we drink to that?"

"Thanks, Mr. Bain," Findlay heard himself saying — he was drowsy in this cordial room, after the long ride down from Aberdeen and after tramping those Northminster streets in miserable vacillation — "but no. I'd order another round for us, except for my train. I'm going to have to say goodnight. We keep a flat in Aberdeen now, and if ever you get to...."

"Call me Bain, or Ralph, or Rafe. That whisky's your medicine, Findlay; I told you so before your cough stopped. As for the train — why, you'll be aboard it, if you really mean to be; I give you my word. I'll see you to the cab. 'We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.' Forgive me, but you've not been long this side of the

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Border, I take it?"

"I came down from Aberdeen today, Bain. And if I don't meet three important men for breakfast at the Hyde Park Hotel" — here Findlay grimaced — "it's all up with me. I've been in oil rigs at Aberdeen for the past two years, and I'm not so young as I was, and my wife is in a bad way. Now I'm in deep trouble — not enough ready money, and the banks pressing me hard about overdrafts."

The careless smile faded from Bain's mouth. Bain stared at him incredulously. "Why, Findlay, that sort of thing doesn't signify for you and me here, you know. Overdrafts! Or don't you know? Don't you actually? The moment I dragged you in, I thought you seemed a bit odd. If you don't mind my saying so, it was as if I'd taken hold on a ghost. I'm told that some people scarcely are aware of the change when they've just crossed the Border. If you don't mind, Mark Findlay, old man — just how was it you died?"

Jimmie was setting two more whiskies before them on the little Indian table; Bain must have given him a sign. The cozy parlor went round for Findlay.

Hadn't he thought too often of dying, and dying swiftly, whatever the consequences? Hadn't he thought of that escape all the hours he'd walked those Northminster streets? Did the death urge show in his face?

For a moment, the two commercial travelers in the corner, and the old lady with her girl companion, and smiling Jimmie, seemed to fade into nothingness. Findlay saw only Bain's daredevil face, gone sober and pallid on the instant. Had one whiskey been too many for Bain, or for himself?

"What do you mean?" Findlay tried not to stammer. "I'm no deader than you are. I might as well be dead, though, if I'm not in London eight hours from now."

"Dead!" Bain laughed, though it seemed to require some effort from him — almost as if Bain were frightened. "Of course we're not dead, old man. Here, do *I* seem dead?" Leaning forward, he gripped Findlay's hand. "There, a good fleshly shake, eh? We wouldn't be just here if we were dead, truly dead, would we, Findlay? I put the question to you too bluntly — that's one of my silly habits, got in the army. What I meant to say was this: how did you cross the Border?" Bain drank, and then resumed.

"There's no harm in calling it 'dying.' We all have to pass through the jaws of death to reach the Crosskeys or any other good sort of place — corruption putting on incorruption, and all that. We all have to die so that we can rise,

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don't we? Was it hard, your crossing? Is the Crosskeys the first place you've come to, this side of eternity? If so, there's the more honor for me, as the first friend to greet you."

Bain drained his glass. "Now drink your dram, old man, because there's nothing left for us to fret about, never, never. 'It wasn't the cough that carried him off, but the coffin they carried him off in.' I say — could it have been that you crossed the Border just outside the door of this hotel, when I heard you hacking there?"

Findlay stood up. Was this host of his drunk, or was he a lunatic? Bain seemed neither, but he might be both. Had he and Bain talked of something like this, so long ago? Not this precisely, but something about death and eternity? Findlay couldn't be bothered, though Bain was rather amusing, not with that train to catch.

"Thanks again," he told Bain. "My train won't wait. And it's not just my own future depending on that breakfast tomorrow, there's my wife, my sick wife, to think of. Good night. If you're ever at Aberdeen...."

"You really don't follow me, do you, old man?" Bain frowned in seeming perplexity. "If you leave now, you'll miss Canon Hoodman. Train won't wait? Why, any train you want will be waiting for you whenever you want it. I'll be taking a train myself to Ayrshire, after a night or two here at the Crosskeys; there's a young woman I mean to walk the moors with. Time doesn't signify; there's no Time for you and me, thank God, Findlay. Why, we've not even begun to talk. How can I explain? You and I aren't dead, though I died once, and I suppose you have, too. We've just begun to live fully. Look here, Mark Findlay, do you believe what you read in the papers?"

"Half the time. Excuse me, but where did you hang my hat and coat?"

"Jimmie!" Bain called. But he did not tell Jimmie to fetch his guest's coat and hat. "Jimmie, find us today's *Post* — and the *Times*, too. Mr. Findlay needs to see them."

Newspapers, inserted in those oldfangled wooden rods, were hanging by the sideboard. It passed through Findlay's mind that the Crosskey Hotel, like a beetle of a hostelry preserved in amber, retained amenities that had vanished nearly everywhere else. Jimmie brought two papers. They were full of news about the military stalemate. On the front page of both, the date was December 24, 1939.

"What in hell is this?" Findlay was two-thirds angry. "It was 1939 when I came to Northminster the first time."

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"That is now," said Bain. "There's only now, praise be: whatever 'now' you like, whatever 'now' I like. Sit down, old man. You need somebody with a head and a tongue better than mine to inform you. I say, Jimmie, Canon Hoodman still is in the house, talking with Mr. Marriner. Could you give him my compliments and ask him to join us, if it's no trouble to him? Tell him that I may have a ghost to show him."

Well, in any event he must have missed his train by this time, Findlay reckoned. After all, how much did that matter? Those three insufferable men at the Hyde Park Hotel would do nothing for him, as the odds stood. The intended meeting had been a last forlorn hope. Fortune had conspired against him, and the stars in their courses. He might as well finish this whiskey; he might as well finish many whiskies. Now it was all over for him, and all over for Marian, poor sick Marian. She had told him he would fail; his nerve had failed him, and he had failed her.

In his bag, at the station luggage room, there lay secreted a sufficient quantity of prescribed capsules, long hoarded. He had feared that he might require them, the whole lot of them, after that Hyde Park breakfast. After he should leave this hotel, he could swallow them at the station, without having to face that grim breakfast after all. Now he had all the time in the world. If a coroner should call it an overdose, there would be some insurance money left for Marian, anyway, despite their having borrowed heavily these past six months. "It is a far, far better thing I do...." Findlay sat down again. There were worse places to spend one's last evening than this snug and well-appointed hotel parlor, with this friendly madman to entertain him.

"Jimmie," said Findlay, "another round of drinks. Nothing matters now."

Bain had been peering at him, as if doubting whether his guest were flesh and blood. "Actually," Bain said, "it *does* matter, don't you know, old man. It matters if you've not yet crossed the Border. It matters if really you're here at the Crosskeys by some uncanny chance — or by providence, I should say. If you're to understand Canon Hoodman, who explains mysteries as well as anybody could, you're not to be half seas over. I beg your pardon. Jimmie, forget those whiskey sodas, and bring us a pot of tea — and some sandwiches, Jimmie."

His hope of survival abandoned, Findlay was willing to humor this lunatic called Ralph Bain. He did feel hungry, after those vain bewildered hours in the streets.

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"All right," he told Bain, "have your fun with me. That was a clever ploy, putting those old newspapers on the racks. Were you merely hoping that some fool, any fool, might come in tonight to be teased by you? Or do you play these macabre tricks at this hotel every night? Why am I a ghost, and not you?"

"It's a private joke, very nearly, that 'ghost,'" Bain said. "The canon and I call anybody a ghost who turns up here, or turns up anywhere else in eternity, but doesn't belong: anybody who hasn't properly crossed the Border, but gets into eternity somehow — for a moment, so to speak — and then passes back into Time again. Let me tell you, Findlay, you're a rarity: here at the old Crosskeys, on Christmas Eve, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-nine, reading in the papers about the Twilight War, you're experiencing a timeless moment. You're in two stations of being simultaneously, I fancy."

Bain leaned toward him earnestly. "Yet I don't think you've passed through the jaws of death. The canon says he's met such people more than once, but I haven't. You believe you're alive, and so you are — though not only in the way you think of 'life.' I fancy you'll leave this pleasant room, whenever you need to, and you'll catch that confounded train of yours, and you'll find yourself back in whatever year of grace you fancy you belong in. That's why I call you a ghost." Bain grinned at him reassuringly.

"You don't belong here, and yet you do belong. To me, you're unreal; you frighten me a trifle, as ghosts are supposed to do. The next thing I know, I may be looking straight through you to the back of your chair. You needn't dread *me.* But here's the tea, and here's the canon."

The canon's grip was as hearty as Bain's. Canon Hoodman was a cheerful northcountryman with a broad mouth and thick spectacles. "You may not remember me, Mark Findlay," he began, "not just yet. Or you may recall only a few words we spoke to each other. If you like, I can offer you a good many more words now."

"Canon," Bain was saying, "I lug in an old acquaintance from the street, and then find that he's not crossed the Border, or so he says; it's a conundrum. When first you and Findlay and I sat down together, I wished we could go on talking forever. And here that possibility's come to pass, but Findlay doesn't understand, and he wants to be off immediately to his private misery."

Was this purported canon some actor recruited by the whimsical

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Bain? Certainly Hoodman looked his part, collar and black suit and all. Findlay forced himself to enter into the spirit of this rag.

"Here's the question," Findlay told Hoodman: "Is Ralph Bain crazy, or am I? And I'd like to know what short of innkeeper puts 1939 newspapers into this residents' parlor."

"You seem out of sorts, Findlay," Hoodman said, "but melancholy men are the wittiest. The manager of this hotel is a very sensible person, and he puts those papers there because he, like everybody else in this house, knows that tonight is Christmas Eve — the verger is nearly done tolling the bell in my old church — of the year of our Lord 1939."

Another wag! Findlay chuckled mordantly, pouring himself another cup of tea with a shaking hand. "Are you suggesting, Canon — if you really are a canon — that I'm in Hell, having coughed myself to death in the street outside, and that I'm condemned to spend eternity in this room, in a little pocket of Time called December the twenty-fourth, 1939?"

The canon smiled a warm and humorous smile. "*Au contraire,* Findlay, if you and Bain and I were in Hell, I fancy we'd not be discussing these mysteries. The damned, as I understand it, have no past and no future: no memories, no expectations. You're in a very different state from that."

This sly game was not unpleasant; and afterwards there would be those deadly capsules at the station, a door out of the prison house of life, leading to the jail yard. With that final ace in the hole, why not play up?

"Well, then, Canon Hoodman," Findlay went on, "if we three, and the other people in this parlor, are imprisoned forever in a cozy moment of Time, how is it that you and Bain talk of 'remembering' me; and how can I remember Bain, though I've forgotten you — if I ever met you before? If we're all dead men, how can we talk about memories and expectations — expecially expectations?"

"I told you, old man," Bain thrust in, "we're *not* dead, none of us. We've come fully alive. And we're not locked up here; it's just that we've chosen, or fallen into, this one timeless moment. It's a good particular timeless moment, isn't it? No especial significance to it, I suppose: simply three friends arguing comfortably before a fire on a winter's night. But we have our choices of moments to experience afresh. It's up to you and the canon and me, separately. This moment is a random sample of timeless moments. There are stronger moments, far stronger, for any of us. Why, if he chose just now, the

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canon might be praying in some 'draughty church at smokefall,' I suppose; or I could be trading stories with some good chaps in a tent in the Western Desert, say, instead of disputing with you. It's a question of what you wish to experience all over again."

As they talked, the heavy tolling of that church bell contributed to the illusion of timelessness that these two fantastics had contrived for him, Findlay thought. Outside in the street there sounded the footfalls and murmuring of a good many people, with now and again children's laughter, folk on their way to midnight service at that church. The hotel was real, the people outside were real, these two clever companions of his were real; Findlay wondered about his own reality.

The canon was speaking now. "Yes, all the good moments or hours or days that you ever experienced are forever present to you, whenever you want them, after you've crossed the Border. We were told that we shall have bodies; we have them. You say that you've not yet crossed the border, Findlay. Well, once you have crossed — and if really you're still in Time, that may be a long while yet for you — then, God willing, you'll understand as we two can't make you understand."

"What's wrong with the present everlasting moment?" Bain inquired. "Ah, I know: no cigars. Jimmie, fetch that box of cigars."

Findlay chose a cigar, presumably his last — a Burma cheroot. He seemed to recall that good Burma cheroots had been easier to find in 1939. Where nowadays did the resident manager of the Crosskeys obtain his supply?

"All right," Findlay responded, keeping his temper despite this waggery, "for the sake of argument I'll accept your metaphysics. We're not dead, but in eternity, you say. Well, what sort of great expectations are we supposed to indulge, aside from another sandwich and another cigar? You two talk well, but this occasion might turn boring if it were to run on forever."

The canon took him up. "As Bain said, it's your choice of all you have experienced. Suppose that your wedding day was among the best days of your life, Mark — of what you call your life. Think of this: you can experience that wedding whenever you like, for eternity."

"You mean that I can *remember* my wedding day? I don't need you to tell me that, canon. You mean that 'happiness is emotion recollected in tranquillity'? That's not enough for me. I don't have any tranquillity left."

The canon shook his head amicably. "No, it's not memory

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that I mean. It's this, rather: if you are given grace, the good things of your life are *experienced,* in all the fullness of your senses, whenever you desire them. True, there's another side to the coin: if you have rejected the grace of God then the evil things of your life are forever present, and you cannot escape them. This unexpected moment here in the Crosskeys may be a sign for you, Mark Findlay, a sign that you may know grace in death, if you choose it."

Ah, how these two jesters, these masters of the dry mock, stuck to their hobgoblin consistency! Findlay laughed sardonically. "So you two can convert yourselves into bridegrooms in the twinkling of an eye, whenever you're in that mood?"

"Not I," Bain admitted. "I never married. I was commissioned a few weeks after we met here, Findlay, and I was good at killing but at nothing else. After El Alamein, where I took some bullets, they gave me the Military Cross. When the War was over, I got my little pension and drank hard every day. Any girl would have been an idiot to have married me. I asked one, and she said it never would do, and she was right. That's the young woman I mean to walk the moors with again, when I leave the Crosskeys."

"Why trouble yourself with her?" Findlay objected, grinning. "There's no marriage or giving in marriage, I'm told, where we three are supposed to be just now. Or can you have your fun all the same?

"So far as marriage goes," Bain said quietly, "we don't *want* what we didn't know the other side of the Border. As for 'fun,' I found in the end that love was better."

"Have you ever read Augustine?" the canon asked Findlay. "No? He learned that truth while he still was in Time."

"I take it, Canon, that you can chat wih Saint Augustine whenever the fit is on you," Findlay scoffed, "and that Bain can play games with Helen of Troy."

"Oh, nothing of that sort." The canon paused. "How may I make it clear? We live only once, and the experiences of that one active life are eternal. I don't meet Augustine in the Crosskeys Hotel, say, because he never was here, naturally, and because I wasn't at Hippo in the fifth century, naturally. Augustine and you and I are joined only through the Mystical Body. As for Bain — may I speak for you, Bain? — an hour's stroll on the moors with that lady, merely talking, means more to him than could the conquest of the face that launched a thousand ships. We don't long for the physical presence of Augustine or of Helen, because the reality which we know satisfies us — which it didn't when we were

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in Time. I don't mean that this fuller reality of ours is static. Instead, our awareness of every timeless moment grows deeper and takes on more meaning. For a small instance, though you and I talked in this room before, you don't remember a word I said. I suspect, however, that you'll not forget what I am saying to you now."

"What about those 'expectations' of yours, when there's nothing new under the sun for you — when you do nothing but enlarge the same experiences?" Findlay thought he had caught this subtle canon there.

"Expectations, Findlay? This living moment in the Crosskeys isn't the whole of the life eternal — hardly." The canon chuckled. "Nor is the reenactment of the love of created beings the whole of what we expect. You know the phrase 'the Beatific Vision.' Well, that's not a phrase only. That vision is yet to come, for Bain and for me. Perhaps we experience the Provisional Judgment now, and so remain tied, in some sense, to experiences within Time. When the Last Judgment is done, perhaps all expectations will be fulfilled, so that there will be nothing left to long for. These are only words to you? Formerly they were not much more than words to me. Words are tools that break in the hand. After you cross the Border, you will know truths that I cannot put into words for you."

There's the last desperate resort of parsons, Findlay thought: flight into bloodless abstractions, empty formulas. He would try another tack. "I fancy you must have been a model of propriety, Bain, to deserve a comfortable berth in eternity like this, eh?"

"I don't deserve it at all." Bain looked down at his strong hands. "I told you that I was good for nothing but killing, and that was true to the very end. Until almost the last, I was all ego, loving nobody but myself. My last action was to destroy a man, or what had been a man. Men are always saying that they'd die for this woman or that one. I said it, too: but what mattered, I did it — for that young woman I mentioned. I did it to shield her from somebody. And I took him with me. It was a beastly business on a high roof, and we went down together — into a river.

"Do you know, Findlay, ordinarily we don't talk here about crossing the Border. I took the liberty of asking you how you crossed, but only because I sensed that there was something peculiar about your coming here. It's bad form, since nasty memories don't fit in here. Yet in its way, even that last fight of mine was a high experience. That one decent impulse of

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mine is why I'm here. Because of that violent act for love — she'd never have taken me — everything else that I'd done was forgiven."

Except for the tolling of the bell, there was silence for a little space. Findlay had to admire Bain for this consummate skill of straight-faced yarn-spinning. Then Bain added, "Now, beyond desire, I'm her friend, and know her always."

"Just like Dante and Beatrice," Findlay commented, puffing dryly on his cheroot.

"Rather," said the canon, knocking the ash from his cigar. "Like Dante and Beatrice."

How often did these two saturnine comedians find the opportunity to pull some chance visitor's leg so systematically? "You gave your life, too, for a female friend, Canon Hoodman?"

"No," the canon answered, "I had no choice as to how I crossed. My wife and I crossed together: I believe a bomb struck our old house in the close; so we've never been parted. She'll be in the congregation when I give the homily at the midnight service, and we'll walk back to the close together. People who come after us in Time don't know that handsome old house of ours, more's the pity; but nothing that's in Time can endure forever. For my wife and me, nevertheless, every stick and brick of that house endures in Eternity."

They couldn't really expect him to swallow all this farrago! Of course these two were aware that he knew they talked tongue-in-cheek; they hoped to provoke him into an outburst of indignation at such stuff and nonsense. Findlay wouldn't let them have that satisfaction. "So you have the pleasure of your wife's company, Canon," he said, smoothly, "and you enjoy your lady friend's conversation, Bain. That's pleasant. But what about souls you're not so fond of? That man who rolled off the roof into the river with you, for instance, Bain?"

"That foul chap!" Bain blew a smoke ring. "God only knows. You can be sure our paths don't cross. In our Father's house are many mansions, but they're not all on the same floor."

Findlay yawned; the jest was wearing thin, and he was dog-tired, and in his luggage those capsules awaited him. These two jesters might be sobered by what they would read about him in tomorrow's papers. After all, his would be the cream of the jest.

"You're quite worn out, Findlay, I can see," the canon was murmuring, "and we've been boring you. Jimmie, is Mr. Marriner still up? Good. Ask him to come, if he has a moment."

The manager of this old-fash-

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ioned hotel turned out to be a small quick man with deep-set eyes. "Something for you, Captain Bain?"

"Marriner," Bain said to him, "our friend Findlay has come a long way. Show him one of your rooms, will you? He still thinks of taking a train, but he might be tempted. This is a very old house, Findlay, part of the building medieval — worth seeing, worth sleeping in."

"Would you prefer a haunted chamber, Mr. Findlay?" Marriner offered. Apparently he was a confederate of Bain and Hoodman. "I don't know that we can supply a spectral monk on demand, but there's a room available where Coleridge slept once."

Marriner led the three of them up a short flight of carpeted stairs, down a longish corridor, up a longer and steeper flight, and round a corner. Behind the door which he opened was a snug single bedroom, massive beams in its low ceiling, papered in blue, with a glistening old bedstead of some rare wood. "If you'd care to sleep deep, Mr. Findlay," Marriner said, "I'd wake you when you might require a call — supposing that you should want it at all."

"I must have missed that train of mine long ago, thanks to these gentlemen," Findlay answered. To sleep in that old bed for eternity! That prospect was far more attractive than were those capsules waiting at the station.

"It's your choice entirely," Bain was saying in his ear. "Free will, you know, old man."

Yet why choose either bed or poison? These chance companions, with their long-faced wit, had cared enough about him to twit him for an hour; somehow they had put heart into him. His cough seemed to have faded away altogether, and these two friends, and the atmosphere of this old house, were invigorating. He wouldn't swallow those capsules tonight, after all, he decided; perhaps never.

For Mirian must not be left to suffer alone, and there were the sensibilities of railway porters to think of. Hyde Park breakfast or no Hyde Park breakfast, something yet might be accomplished in London with somebody or other — given will, given spirit, given grace. Behind this evening's charade there had moved some quickening power, some hint or glimpse of hope. *How* a man dies, and with what justification — this absurd interval of talk had wakened Findlay to awareness of such matters. He would not plunge himself into nothingness without another effort or two.

Canon Hoodman had been watching him closely. "If you feel ready for a bed," the canon re-

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marked, laying a hand on Findlay's shoulder, "you'll not find a better one than this, Mark. But if you've duties you can't ignore — why, there's always a London train for you."

"No, thanks, gentlemen," Findlay said, "I've miles to go before I sleep."

Bain nodded. "You still have hostages to Fortune, I see. And, after all, that bed can be yours whenever you need it. I'll walk you to the corner."

At the front door, Findlay shook hands with the canon and Marriner. The two of them — if Marriner was privy to the plot — kept up to the last their roguish elaborate pretense. "We'll have more to discuss when you come to us," the canon told him.

"I don't expect to pass this way again."

"Yet you shall." Findlay and Bain went down the white steps and into the drifting mist; the canon waved.

That short street, it turned out, was quite as lovely as Findlay had thought it to be, in his glimpses before Bain had drawn him into the Crosskeys. If only he could have lingered to inspect it more closely! Ahead of them, stragglers were hastening through the churchyard and into the lighted church. And that bell tolled on.

"Do you have any idea when the first morning train will leave, Bain?"

"It will be there for you, old man. And all of us at the Crosskeys will be there for you, when you look for us. Ask the cabbie."

Then the bell ceased to toll. Findlay glanced at his watch; it must have stopped in the Crosskeys. He looked backward toward the cathedral tower. Yet surely the cathedral clock, too, had run down, and at the same time, for it stood at half-past eleven.

"Here you are, Mark," Bain was telling him. "Do you make out a cab stand to the right? Just wave and shout. Wage the good fight, old man."

Sure enough, there was a taxi a few yards distant, on the modern street which intersected this ancient lane. Findlay waved and shouted, and the taxi rolled toward him. "To the station, sir?" the driver was asking now.

"Just a moment. Ralph, you rascal, you've given me a lively evening, though...." Findlay turned to face Ralph Bain.

Bain was not to be seen. Nor was the Crosskeys Hotel there — only a vacant site strewn with rubble.

The charming houses of the old street were gone, or at least most of them, and those which survived were ghastly derelicts. That street was wholly lifeless.

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Findlay swung back toward the taxi. Beyond it was the church with the Norman tower, or rather the wreck of a church, all dark, no glass in what remained of the window tracery. The nave was roofless. A mercury-vapor lamp in the modern street glowered over the churchyard, and by it Findlay could make out a metal sign which read "Public Gardens, Custody of Ministry of Works."

"Station, sir? Time enough to catch the midnight for London. You can hear it coming down from the north now."

Findlay tumbled into the cab. "Tell me — tell me, how long has that street been smashed?"

"Before my time — 1941, they say. Them German fire bombs done for it. Some year, they say, the Corporation'll get round to buildin' council houses there."

"And what's the name of that street?"

"Saviourgate, sir."

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David Drake's new story concerns a young girl who, having survived years of chaos and plague, escapes from a different kind of terror and flees deep into a forest to begin a new life . . .

Children of The Forest

by DAVID DRAKE

When Teller came in from the field, gnarled as his hoe handle and looking twice his forty years, his wife said, "The cow has gone dry, man."

Teller scowled. She had slapped out her words like bolts from a crossbow. He understood them, understood also why she was whetting the black iron blade of their only knife. From his wife, warped and time-blackened by the same years that had destroyed him, Teller turned to his daughter Lena.

And Lena was a dazzle of sunlight in the darkened hut.

She was six, though neither of her parents could have told a stranger that without an interval of mumbling and dabbing fingers to cracked lips. But there were no strangers. In the dozen years since the Black Death had swept southern Germany, the track that once led to the high road and thence to Stuttgart had merged back into the forest. The hut was all of civilization, a behive with two openings in its thatch. Teller now stooped in the doorway; above him was the roof hole that served as chimney for the open fire in the center of the room. By that fire sat Lena, easing another balk of wood under the porridge pot before looking up at her father. Her smile was timid, but the joy underlying it was as real as the blond of her sooty hair. She dared not show Teller the welts beneath her shift, but she knew that her mother would not beat her in his presence.

"I said, the cow has gone dry," the woman repeated. The rasp of iron on stone echoed her words. "You know we can't go on until the harvest with three mouths and no milk."

"Woman, I'll butcher —"

"You will not." She slid to the floor and faced him, bandy-legged and shorter on her own legs than

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when sitting on the stool. "The meat will rot in a month, we have no salt. Three mouths will not last the summer on the cow's meat, man.

"Three mouths will not last the summer."

She was an iron woman, black-faced and black-hearted. She did not look at Lena, who cowered as her mother stepped forward and held out the wood-shafted knife to Teller. He took it, his eyes as blank as the pit of his mouth opening and closing in his beard. "Perhaps . . . I can hunt more. . . .?"

"Hoo, coward!" mocked the woman. "You're afraid to leave the clearing now for the woods devils, afraid to go out the door to piss in the night!" The reek of the wall across from the pine-straw bedding proved her statement. "You'll not go hunting, man."

"But —"

"Kill her. *Kill her!*" she shrieked, and Lena's clear voice wailed hopelessly as a background to the raucous cries. Teller stared at the weapon as though it were a viper which had crawled into his hand in the night. He flung it from him in a fury of despair, not hearing it clack against the whetstone or the *ping!* of the blade as it parted.

The woman's brief silence was a as complete as if the knife had pierced her heart instead of shattering. She picked up the longest shard, a hand's breadth of iron whose edge still oozed light, and cradled it in her palms. Her voice crooned without meaning, while Teller watched and Lena burrowed her face into the pine needles.

"We can't all three eat and live to the harvest, man," the woman said calmly. And Teller knew that she was right.

"Lena," he said, not looking at the girl but instead at his cloak crumpled on the earthen floor. It was steerhide, worn patchily hairless during the years since he had bartered eggs for it from a passing peddler. That one had been the last of the peddlers, nor were there chickens any more since the woods demons had become bolder.

"Child," he said again, a little louder but with only kindness in his voice. He lifted the cloak with his left hand, stroked his daughter between the shoulder blades with his right. "Come, we must go for a little journey, you and I."

The woman backed against the hut wall again. Her eyes and the knife edge had the same hard glitter.

Lena raised her face to her father's knee; his arm, strong for all its stringiness, lifted her against his chest. The cloak enveloped her and she thrashed her head free. "I'm hot, Papa."

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"No, we'll play a game," Teller said. He hawked and spat cracklingly on the fire before he could continue. "You won't look at the way we go, you'll hide your head. All right, little one?"

"Yes, Papa." Her curls, smooth as gold smeared with river mud, bobbled as she obediently faced his chest and let him draw the leather about her again.

"The bow, woman," Teller said. Silently she turned and handed it to him: a short, springy product of his own craftsmanship. With it were the three remaining arrows, straight-shafted with iron heads, but with only tufts remaining of the fletching. His jaw muscles began to work in fury. He thrust the bow back to her, knots of anger dimpling the surface of his bare left arm. "String it! String it, you bitch, or —"

She stepped away from his rage and quickly obeyed him, tensing the cord without difficulty. The wood was too supple to make a good bow, but a stiffer bowshaft would have snapped the bark string. Teller strode from the hut, not deigning to speak again to his wife.

There was no guide but the sun, and that was a poor, feeble twinkling through the ranked pines and spruces. It was old growth, save in slashes where age or lightning had brought down a giant and given opportunity to lesser growth. Man had not made serious inroads on this portion of the forest even before the plague had stripped away a third of the continent's population. Fear had driven Teller and his wife to flee with their first child, leaving their village for a lonely clearing free from contamination. But there were other fears than that of the Black Death, things only hinted at in a bustling hamlet. In the forest they became a deeper blackness in the shadows and a heavy padding on moonless nights.

They were near him now.

Teller lengthened his stride, refusing to look to the sides or behind him. He was not an intelligent man, but he knew instinctively that if he acknowledged what he felt, he would be lost. He would be unable to move at all, would remain hunched against a tree trunk until either starvation or the demons came for him.

Lena began humming a little tune. Though off-key, it was recognizable as a lullaby. Teller's wife had never bothered to rock Lena to sleep, but their elder daughter, born before the panicked flight into the wilderness, had absorbed enough of the memories of her babyhood to pass them on to her sister. It was not the plague that had taken the girl, nor yet the demons. Rather, there had been a

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general malaise, a wasting fed by seven years in an environment that supported life but did nothing to make life supportable. In the end she had died, perhaps saving Teller the earlier agony of a journey like the one he made now.

Far enough, he decided. A spruce sapling thrust up from among three adult trees. Though its bole was only a hand's breadth in diameter, the first branches were a full ten feet in the air. It formed a post firmer than that on which Sebastian was martyred.

"Now, Lena," Teller said as he put the girl down, "you'll wait here by this tree for a while."

She opened her eyes for the first time since she had left the house with her father. The conifers around her were spearpoints thrust through the earth. Black-green branches shuddered in a breath of wind. The girl screamed, paused, and screamed again.

Teller panicked at the sound and the open terror of her brighter blue gaze. He stopped fumbling at the cord knotted about his waist and struck open-handed, his palm smudging the soot on her cheek. Lena bounced back against the spruce trunk, stunned mentally rather than physically by the blow. She closed her mouth, unblinking, then spun to her feet and ran. Teller gulped fear and remorse as he snatched up his bow to follow.

Lena ran like a startled fawn. She should not have been able to escape a grown man, but the fearsome shadows came to her aid. When Lena dodged around the scaly bole of a hemlock, Teller, following, was knocked sprawling by a branch. He picked himself up, picked up also the arrows he had scattered as he fell. He nocked the one with the most fletching, though he could not have explained to a questioner what he meant to do with it. "Lena?" he called. The trees drank his voice.

A rustle and a stutter of light caught his attention, but it was a squirrel's flag tail jerking on a spruce tip. Teller eased the tension on his bowstring.

There was another sound behind him, and he turned very quickly.

Lena, trembling in the crease of a giant that had fallen so long ago that the trees growing around it were of nearly equal girth, heard her father blundering nearby. Her frightened whimper was almost a silence itself, no more than the burr of a millipede's feet through the leaf mold in front of her nose. She heard Teller call, then a ghastly double cry that merged with the twang of a bow. No more voices, then, but a grunt and the *chock!* of something hollow crushing against a tree trunk.

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For a moment, then, there was real silence.

"Coo-o?" trilled a voice too deep to be birdlike. "Coo-o-o?" it repeated, closer now to Lena, though unaccompanied by the crackling brush that had heralded her father's progress. "Coo?" and it was directly above her. Almost more afraid to look up than not to. Lena slowly turned her head.

It was leaning over the log to peer down at her, a broad face set with sharp black eyes and a pug nose. The grinning lips were black, the skin pink where it could be glimpsed beneath the fine, russet fur. Lena's hands swung to her mouth and she bit down hard on her knuckles. The creature vaulted soundlessly over the log. It was about the height of Lena's father but was much deeper in the chest. Palms and soles were bare of the fur that clothed the rest of it. Its right hand reached out and plucked away the arrow that flopped from its left shoulder. A jewel of blood marked the fur at that point, but the creature's torso and long arms wee already sticky with blood not its own.

The hands reached down for Lena. She would have screamed again, but her mind was folding up within her like a white blur.

"Coo-ree?" questioned a liquid voice in Lena's ear, and she blinked awake. A girl with a shy grin was watching her, a child so innocent that Lena forgot to be afraid. Even though the child was as furry as the adult who must have brought Lena to the grassy hollow in which she now lay. A smile that bared square, yellowed teeth split the fur, and the little — shorter even than Lena though more compactly built — creature held out a double handful of hemlock nodules, painstakingly knocked clean of dirt. The skin of her hands was a rich onyx black in contrast to the broken, copper-colored fingernails.

As shyly as her benefactress, Lean took the roots and crunched one between her teeth. The nodule had a rich, almost meaty, flavor and a texture pleasant to her gums. She smiled back. A twittering at the crest of the hollow caused her to spin about and gape at the broad-chested male creature she had met in the woods, now with a smaller companion to either side. On the right was a four-dugged female, slimmer than the male and slightly hunched. The remaining woods man — but Lena's mind still shrieked demon, troll — was another child, obviously male and of lighter coloration than his parents. His cublike roundness had not yet given way to ropy adult musculature, and his nervous smile was a reflection of his sister's.

Lena stood. Her body had gone

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cold, and the bright sunlight seemed suddenly to glance away as from a block of ice. The adult male had washed since she first saw him: his pelt was smooth and clean, save for the smudged left shoulder. Another drop of blood oozed to the surface, and the female, seeing it, cooed in vexation and nuzzled the wound. Her teeth chopped as she cleaned it. The male pushed her gently away, his eyes locked with Lena's. Trembling with courage she had not known was hers, Lena bit off another hemlock nodule, then extended the remainder of the bunch toward the watching woods folk. The three before her began to caper with joy, and a warm, furry arm encircled Lena's waist from behind.

They were foragers and therefore by necessity wanderers, the family of which Lena was now a part. After a month in the bowl which chance or ancient volcanism had pocked into the Jura Mountains, they spent a pair of weeks combing a stream with a different sleeping place every night. Food was plentiful in that spring and the summer it wore into: roots and berries, spruce tips and the tender shoots of other vegetation; birds' eggs while they lasted, but never the birds themselves. Lena was almost too young to remember the last of her parents' hens. Still, learning that they had succumbed to nest raiding, not slaughter, calmed a remaining bristle of unease.

She tried not to think of Teller at all.

Kort was the father of the family, even-tempered but awesomely strong. Rather than climb a hardwood to pick nuts before the squirrels had combed them, he would find a boulder or the largest fallen limb in the neighborhood and smash it against the tree trunk, showering himself and the ground with the ripe offerings. It was Kort, too, who trudged off on day-long journeys to the cave in which the family wintered, carrying in a bark-cloth basket the dried excess of their gleaning. The winter stores were kept beneath a stone too tight-fitting for a mouse to slide around and too massive for a bear's awkward limbs to thrust aside.

But if Kort's strength was the shaft which supported the family's existence, it was the quick mind of Kue-meh, his mate, which provided directing force. Her fingers wove the strips of cambium into fabric as smooth and as supple as the wool and linen of the villages beyond the forest. The woods folk used the cloth for carrying bulky goods, not as clothing, though Lena once ineptly wove a crossbelt for herself when her shift disintegrated. Kue-meh guided the foraging, judging its progress and determin-

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ing when and where the family would move. She could tell at a glance which hickory nut was sound and sweet, which had been emptied in its shell by a worm.

At first the children were never wholly alone, for there were dangers in the forest. Not the bears, so much, for their strength and ugly tempers were outweighed by clumsiness and their preference for other food. Even Lena was soon able to scramble up a tree before a peevish grunt gave way to a charge. Lynxes were more of a potential threat, for they were swift and had the blood-lust common to all cats. Still, Chi, the female woods child and smallest of the three, weighed forty pounds by now and was too strong and active to be a comfortable victim.

The wolves, though, the wolves. . . .

They feared nothing very greatly, those lean gray killers. Fire, perhaps, but the woods folk feared it more, and Lena learned to avoid the flames after being cuffed fiercely away from a lightning-slashed tree. From spring through fall the wolves padded through the forest alone and in pairs, tracking a plump doe or a healthy fawn to rip down and devour. Like most powerful carnivores, the wolves chose their prey not for its weakness but for its taste — and after years of chaos and the plague, some of them had found a taste for men.

Lena's long legs and the new sense of freedom brought by roaming the forest with folk who thought it home, not exile, took her and Faal, the young male, almost into long-toothed jaws. They were digging root nodules, using sharpened stakes and cloth bags while Kue-meh wove. Faal went around one side of a huge hemlock, Lena the other — the far side. The empty woods, a chorus of blacks and greens and browns, spoke to her suddenly. Dropping her equipment with a silent giggle, Lena darted off among the aisles of trees.

Faal heard the pad of her feet — months in the wild had trained Lena's step, but not beyond notice of ears that had been born there. He followed her without calling or even thinking. Faal was swiftly gaining his father's deep chest but showed signs of being in Kort's mental image as well. The two children were gone a minute or longer before Kue-meh looked up from her own work and Chi to notice that her other charges were gone. She hooted in anger, but Faal was already beyond earshot and Lena was ahead of him.

She was a shuttle racing over a loom of needles and spruce twigs. Faal was stronger and his lungs might have brought him abreast of her in time, but Lena's legs would

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have been the envy of a doe. Faal on his stumpy limbs could not outsprint the girl. But the two wolves which converged on Lena in a grove of beeches were quicker yet.

Lena stopped, too startled at first to be frightened. Faal had aimed a playful tackle at her before he saw the reason for her halt. He flopped to the leaf mold instead and skidded. The nearer of the red-tongued wolves lowered its tail and hunched.

Lena stepped without thought between Faal and the gray killer. The wolf drew back. It was more than the scent of a true man, the reivers with iron and fire, where only woods folk had been expected. There was something within Lena herself that allowed her, a slim six-year-old, to face down a pair of wolves. They stood for an instant, each of them half again the girl's size; then they bolted. Only their fresh spoor was visible a moment later when Kue-meh raced into the glade, Chi under her left arm and a six-foot pine knot in her right hand. Lena and Faal were pummeled heavily for the run, but Kue-meh spent the rest of the afternoon in thought. Afterwards she let all three children stray, so long as her own two kept close to Lena.

Early hunger and a vegetarian diet should have stunted Lena's growth. Instead she gained willowy inches to quickly overtop Faal and Chi. The woods folk were a cleanly people, and the grime that had disfigured Lena's first six years disappeared in the ice-fed stream nearest the hollow in which she joined the family. It never returned. Her skin was clear and did not, even bare to the sun and the wind, take on the swarthy cast of her parents'. In the summer she was a warm brown, traced with the thin scabs of bramble cuts; in the winter her complexion counterfeited the creamy yellowness of old ivory polished by loving hands.

For all the beauty of her body and skin, Lena's hair was her crown. It had never been cut, a result of her mother's apathy rather than any interest in the girl's adornment. Washed out and laboriously carded with twigs by all four of the woods folk, it flowed down her back like liquid gold. Loose, it was a bright flood behind her as she ran — but then it snagged and caught and diminished. Faal began to plait it in the evenings, imitating Kue-meh's bark weavings. Simple at first, the patterns grew increasingly complex and changed nightly. The hair was Faal's delight. During the long winter evenings he spent hours braiding and reopening her tresses, then braiding them again. Lena bore the attention, but her mind strayed beyond the boy's gentle fingers.

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There was another predator in the forest, though Lena was twelve before she encountered it. She was miles from the high crag the family then occupied, following Kort to the winter cave, when a horn wound in the near distance. Kort's reaction was to panic. He danced in a little circle of indecision, then began scrambling up a princely fir tree. The bag of stones jerked with every hunch of his back, scattering bunches of hemlock nodules. Kort's feet and long right arm—his left held the bag and, in any case, would not lift above shoulder height since the arrow wound had healed — had shot him halfway up the trunk before he realized that Lena's progress was much slower than his own. There was more than a difference in strength. Though the woods folk did not have opposed big toes either, their control of their foot muscles was much greater than that of Lena's subspecies.

Kort scrambled down again, chattering haste in an angry voice. Lena, terrified by the uncertain situation, tried to obey and lost her grip, slipping ten feet to the ground. Kort's nervous rage burst out in a clatter of syllables. Finally the stocky male threw himself up the bole in leaps that would have been impressive even if horizontal. He caught the bag of provisions in the crotch of a huge limb eighty feet in the air, then dropped back to Lena's level in four incredible stages. Slinging the girl with as little ceremony as he had the bag, he remounted the tree with equal speed. Shuddering with fear, pressed between the bole and Kort's great gasping breaths, Lena stared at the ground so far below that it trembled in the breeze. The horn blew again, very nearby.

A stag wobbled out of a clump of firs, its tongue grayish and drooling from the corner of its jaw. Twenty yards from the tree in which Kort and Lena sheltered, the deer fell under the whipsaw impact of a pair of mastiffs. Each dog looked as large as the victim. The stag cartwheeled. One of the great brindled dogs clamped on the deer's throat, the other caught the right foreleg. There was a flurry of humus. The stag's spine snapped like the first crack that follows the lightning.

There were a dozen dogs swirling on the forest floor now, hounds trained to back off after guiding the killer mastiffs to their prey. They belled and leaped for gobbets of the deer still thrashing in its death throes. The riders were on them then, two green-garbed huntsmen with full beards and long whips with which they cut at the milling pack . . . and a third man, a youth whose hair gleamed almost white in a stray beam of sun. He

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rocked back in the saddle of his great gray stallion and laughed to the sky. Lena froze to see his face lifting, but he was not searching the treetops, was only bubbling over with the joy of the kill.

He was splendid, perfect in her eyes.

There were more riders, scores of men on foot including dog handlers as shaggy and grim as the beasts they dragged off the mangled stag. A huntsman's broad knife flashed and he raised the deer's ears and tail to the laughing youth. An unexpected warmth had driven the fear from Lena's mind. She watched, empty even of wonder at the scene beneath her — more men by ten times than she had ever before seen — while her eyes drank in every motion, every nuance of the young rider in red and gold.

Quick knives unlaced the deer, spilling the entrails to the reward of the hounds. The mastiffs sat aloof on their haunches, nearly the height of the footmen who skirted them with nervous eyes. Those killers were fed once daily and scorned to show interest in the game they brought down. Only their tongues . . . they flashed and rolled, infinitely flexible as they wiped clean the bloody jowls.

The babble thinned as did the crowd below. The hounds were tired and sated. They whined when the handlers chained them in pairs, but they allowed the men to lead them back the way they had come. Two brawny retainers slung the gutted deer on a pole and trotted off behind the youth on horseback. Riders drifted after them, talking and laughing as they passed out of earshot. Nothing remained but a ragged circle trampled black on the leaf mold. The horn was playing a caracole that seemed to hang in the air even after it was actually inaudible.

"The Ritter Karl," Lena was whispering to herself. She slurred into the heavy Swabish of her parents the name purred by the retainers. "Karl von Arnheim. . . ."

Kort, already reslinging the load of food, paid her no attention. But Lena continued to roll the syllables under her tongue.

Months passed. Occasionally there were true men in the forest: a pair of nervous travelers with packs and staves, whistling into the shadows; a vagabond whose rags were streaked with pus from the ulcers they covered; once a dozen men together, armed and as lean as the wolves . . . these wore mismated finery and as many as a dozen rings on each hand.

The von Arnheim hunt did not pass close enough for Lena to hear and run to it.

The woods folk traveled, but they did not roam. Lena's wander-

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ings, at first for hours and then for days, were a cause of great concern to the family. Kue-meh pleaded with her, but the soft, cooing language of the folk had no words for the emotions that were driving the girl. The pleading stopped in time, for none of the family could catch Lena now if she ran. A foraging people learns not to waste effort. Some useful knowledge came from the trips: food sources that the family could exploit now or in the future, caves that opened into spacious chambers from throats too narrow for a bear to enter. But more and more, Lena's travels were to the edge of the fields of men; and this she did not explain to the woods folk, knowing instinctively that if she had, nothing would have kept Kue-meh from ordering an immediate move scores of miles deeper into the forest.

And already the trips were considerable endeavors. Settlements had shrunk back from the trees, save for scattered households as Teller's had been. There were more of those than Lena would have guessed in the days when the forest was a prison wall, but rarely did the inhabitants attempt to farm the thin soil as had her parents. Most were charcoal burners, blackened men or couples too bent to display sexual distinctions, hiking ever further to find the hardwoods that stoked their greedy kilns. Their huts were ragged shambles, sometimes lean-tos sprawled against some forest giant; but the kilns were anchors, too slow and demanding of construction to be abandoned for new sites nearer the fuel. The increasing journeys to find an oak in the evergreen forest, then to fell it and laboriously drag back lengths with a shoulder harness, left no time for the necessary leisure of building another kiln.

Spread by the plague, the lonely farmers were men who had tried to escape Death by running and had delayed his approach by a score of miserable years. The charcoal burners were caught between the upper and nether millstones of shrunken markets and scarcer raw materials, the farmers between declining fertility and impoverishment of tools. The third group, the meat hunters, had shrunk also, though they might have been expected to increase. Game had returned to the fringe lands when men had melted away in the black ooze of the plague, but the forest had grown darker. Even those who had made their living in it for decades began to edge out into the sunlight.

The demons that haunted the minds of humans in the forest were not the woods folk. In all her ramblings, Lena found no sign of

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hairy men other than Kort and his family.

She searched farther, into the lands where farms still sprawled in the open and men plowed behind animals instead of prodding the soil with a stick. In the dusk she eeled along hedgerows so silently that the hens nesting in them did not stir. Where there were dogs, they rose and stalked stiff-legged over to Lena. After they sniffed at her, they whined and walked away. Occasionally a persistent brute would nuzzle the girl until her fingers stroked a rumbling purr from his rib cage. None of the beasts barked or attacked her.

The domestic animals were new to her, but she paid them little attention. Lena had come to the lands of men to find a man.

The farmers' huts were windowless, occasionally stone or proper wood but more often wattle and daub. The girl's eyes found chinks when the buildings were lighted, raked the faces of sleepy residents when they stumbled out to relieve themselves on the ground. But the man she sought would not be found in a hovel. It was long months before she came to understand that, however, since her upbringing had been silent about the Herren, the Masters.

As the seasons passed, as a month of searching became twelve, Lena's life was still almost wholly within the forest. The trips beyond were windows of excitement that sparkled to set off well-loved panels of wood. The tall child had become a tall girl, muscled like a deer but with the same lithe slimness she had borne from the first. The woods folk did most things with grace, but they could not run. Faal watched Lena's sudden fits of exuberance, her flashing spurts across a clearing or through a briar thicket without misstep. His eyes glowed with the wonder and delight of a prophet to whom an angel was descending.

At night his copper nails glinted as they plaited her hair in wondrous fashion.

In a human world with little romance, the golden wraith became a legend before she was truly a rumor. Cottagers nodded and swilled thin beer as one of their number embellished an instant's vision. Sometimes Lena became a messenger from God or a Hell-sprite, searching for an infant's soul to steal. More often, the stories were rooted deeper in the soul-earth of the peasants than Christ would ever be, and lowered voices spoke of forest shadows and spirits of the Earth.

Marvel in most listeners became professional curiosity in gray Rausch the huntsman. His belt knife, honed to a wire edge on a stream-tumbled egg of granite, had

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silver mountings and the rampant wyvern crest of the von Arnheims. The late ritter, Karl's father Otto, had presented it to Rausch twenty-one years before to replace the knife his junior huntsman had broken on a boar's scapula. Barehanded, ignoring the blood-slick tusks, Rausch had wrestled the beast to the dirt at the feet of the ritter's pregnant wife. From that day he rode at Otto's right stirrup and that of Karl after him. He would not have exchanged that blade for the emperor's scepter.

Save for when von Arnheim hunted, Rausch's time was his own. If he chose to examine a hedgerow on his knees, snuffling like a gray-jowled hound, who was there to gainsay him? So Rausch listened and he watched, while as carefully as a cathedral mason his mind was constructing the hunt that would crown him and his master.

When the first hound belled, Lena ignored it. She knew now from long experience that the dogs were not her enemies. She had been away from the family the past three days, spending the daylit hours in the forest fringe and the nights deeper into the open lands than she had ever gone before. The castle sitting gray on a detached plateau had drawn her eyes months earlier, but anticipation itself had delayed her approach to it. Now at last she had slipped to the very edge of its straggling curtain walls, let her fingers caress the rough stone. It could easily be climbed, but its hidden interior made the act not a moment's but a thing for long pondering in the forest depths. That in her mind, Lena had started back, her course across the fields more hasty than deliberate since she had let the dawn stride too nearby as she studied the wall.

The second joyous bugling would have been a surface impression as well, except for the prompt echo of the hunting horn.

Lena was already among the trees. Her first reaction was that of her foster father, to choose the highest and secrete herself in the upper branches. A premonition that this hunt was no chance crossing of her path drove her instead to headlong flight. Panic rode her, a brutal jockey whose violence spewed out the strength that might otherwise have carried her free.

For a mile she sprinted, leaping obstacles and dreading at every instant that the hounds would give tongue again. They did not. She half turned, then, her nerves begging for the object of their fear, and her right shoulder brushed an oak sapling. It was no more than a glancing blow, but it sufficed to break her stride and allow reaction to her masterless effort to throw her

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to the ground.

And as she lay sobbing on the needle-strewn earth, the hounds and the horn sounded again. She had gained on her pursuers; but they knew, dogs and men, that a hunt was decided in its last moments, not the first. They suited their pace to that certainty. With proper governance, Lena could have run all day. In the darkness, when the men were blind and the dogs nervously unwilling to range ahead, she would have disappeared. A night of sleepless excitement and the disastrous sprint had gutted her. Fear drove Lena back to her feet, but she had lost the ability to force the pace.

With leisure to choose the course, Lena might have led the hunt into empty stretches of the forest where only squirrels would have been disturbed by its passage. Terror eliminated all chance of such forethought, and she plunged straight as a plumb line for the distant cedar copse in which she had last huddled with the woods folk. Perhaps she would have done the same in any event: Lena had never before been hunted, and she lacked the instincts of the wild-born.

The sun was well up before a bright goose quill signaled the nearest of the hunters to Lena's backward glance. The feather bobbed, visible when the green hat and man and charger beneath it were not. She turned as if unfeeling, her face an ivory cameo, her legs scissors of bronze. She did not pump her arms as she ran, avoiding a practice that could stitch a runner's torso with cramps while the great veins of the legs still balanced oxygen and poisons in the working muscles.

The hounds were close behind her. The men may not have known how close, for except in that instant's flash down an aisle of trees they had been beyond sight. Rausch left little to chance, and two of the riders were horse handlers leading picked remudas. But time was lost changing from foundered mounts to fresh ones, and the strings could not follow with the ease of the unhindered riders through brush that clutched at leadropes. The dogs, loping with their muzzles high and quivering with the fresh scent, yelped madly but did not attempt to close the twenty yards separating them from their quarry. They were the fingers of Death, but not his jaws.

In a noon-bright clearing deep in the forest, Lena stumbled a second time. She rolled smoothly to her feet and collapsed, her reflexes whole but her body without the strength to effect them. The hounds were in a yapping, yelping circle around her. When she tried to rise again, the foam-smeared breast of

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a great stallion slammed her down.

Lena's lungs were balls of yellow fire. Above her bellowed the green-suited hunter, a little man who had unslung his cocked arbalest to wave it as a signal of triumph.

The knobbed end of a ten-foot tree limb dashed his brains out with the effectiveness of a trebuchet.

Kue-meh, bandy-legged and slight, had darted through the pack. If her strength was inferior to that of Kort, it was still beyond the standards of true men — and the female had the cold will to overcome panic and act in the face of catastrophe. The hounds gave back, snarling. The riderless horse lurched away from the dragging weight still caught in the reins. Two more men, Karl in red silk and cloth-of-gold and Rausch beside him, his grim face a fortress in the midst of chaos, burst into the clearing in which their victim lay. Kue-meh hissed at them and waggled her brain-spattered club.

Rausch reined up and his left hand caught his master's bridle as well, preventing the youth from thrusting into the deadly circle of the club. Then he whistled, and from behind his horse, stark as Furies, loped a pair of mastiffs.

There was neither choice nor hope. Kue-meh strode forward as boldly as if her death were not certain. She swung at the nearer of the mastiffs, missing her aim as it reared back. Kort bellowed from the edge of the clearing, but his rage was too late. The second mastiff's leap ended with its fangs grinding on the bones of Kue-meh's right shoulder. She cried out despairingly as the first dog's jaws closed on her head.

Her neck popped loudly.

The smack of a hunting crossbow was simultaneous.

Halfway between the brush and the killer dogs, Kort's body jerked backwards. The fourth hunter had ridden into the clearing, having paused first to lay a square-headed quarrel in the launching groove of his weapon. The great iron bolt lifted Kort, carrying part of his breastbone with it through the back of his ribs.

The mastiffs stalked away as the pack began to scuffle for its trophies. The archer slung his arbalest from the saddle of his blowing horse and dismounted to whip the dogs away from Kort. Rausch, too, slipped to the ground, a purposeful thumb on the edge of his blade as he walked toward Kue-meh.

"No, these — creatures — are unclean," the ritter said, triumph vibrant through the weariness of his voice. "We won't carry those back. Let the dogs eat." He lifted himself out of the saddle. His eyes remained fixed on Lena's, holding

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her firm as a snake would a rabbit. His breeches and tunic were shot with gold no brighter than his unbound hair. Froth from the succession of horses he had ridden to death blackened his calves and thighs, and his tunic was dark with his own sweat. Still his broad shoulders did not droop and there was laughter on his tongue after he splashed it with wine from the skin Rausch offered. "So . . . She gave us a run, did she not, my Rauschkin? But I think she was worth a few horses, no . . . ? And even poor Hermann, he rode well, but it was his own fault if he let a troll brain him."

In a more businesslike voice he added to Rausch, "Be ready to hold her arms."

Lena's eyes were open, staring. But even if the fact registered on her mind, she would not at first have understood why von Arnheim was unlacing his breeches.

Eventually, awareness returned. They had tied her for the ride back to the castle, her wrists to the saddlehorn and her ankles lashed to one another beneath the horse's belly. That pain she had escaped as during the grim, slow jogging she lay slumped over the corpse of Hermann who hung crosswise in front of her. Her blond hair was matted over a pair of transverse welts. Rausch had finally used the loaded end of his whip to quiet the girl for his master.

Her thighs were sticky with blood, some of it from the brambles.

She was in a tiny room when she awakened. Outside, a mastiff growled. It had a low rumble, penetrating without being loud, that could terrify in a way that the frenzied barking of lesser beasts could not. The hour was long past sundown, but odor alone told Lena that she had been thrust into an empty kennel with the mastiffs on guard at the opening. Unlike Karl's human retainers, the great dogs could be depended on to keep all others away from what was, for now, the ritter's property alone.

Lena squirmed to the doorway. A horse-huge mastiff lay across it. The beast's head was raised, and one of the dog handlers, well aware of the brute's capabilities, was scuttling away across the muddy courtyard. Only the casks of strong ale, broached for the ritter's triumph, had given the man courage to approach as closely as he had.

Awakened by the intruder, the brindled dog turned to lick its own flanks. Lena froze, but moonlight on her hair drew the broad muzzle into the opening. The eyes were calm and dark-pupiled, larger than a man's. The mastiff's tongue flapped against Lena's temple like a soft rag, sponging at the blood

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caked there.

Fearfully — no present kindness would erase memory of Kue-meh's last moment of life — Lena brushed her fingers across the dog's forehead, then caressed the upthrust ears. Power burred again in the dog's thorax, but it now was rich with delight. The head gave back, directed by the girl's proddings where it could not have been forced, and let her worm out into the open.

The courtyard was empty of all but the two dogs and a squalor which even the gentle moon limned clearly. The second, fawn-colored, mastiff whined and nuzzled Lena wetly. There was a faint murmuring from the other kennels, wattled domes little different in design from the huts of the peasants. No man or other dog appeared to try the wrath of the killers who now supported the girl on either side.

Her hands absorbing strength from the skin folded over the dogs' withers, Lena made her way to the wall. Behind her, the tower of the keep climbed seventy feet from the ground. No lights gleamed through its arrowslits. The drink that had enspirited one man had crumpled all his fellows. Even perfect success could only briefly have counteracted the exertion required to gain it, and the ritter's ale-sodden feast had done for the stay-at-homes as well. Three crossbowmen snored away their guard on the tower, and the occasional sounds from beyond the low wall to the inner court came from the fowl and pigs of the humans quartered there. The snorts of the horses sharing the outer courtyard with Lena and the dogs were muted. Seven had been ridden to death during the morning or had been swallowed in the forest beyond later recall by the exhausted hunters.

Lena touched the stones of the curtain wall, massive gray blocks more of nature than of man. She was beyond strength or weakness now, as inanimate as the limestone in which her hands found natural holds. The larger, brindled mastiff raised itself to its full height on the wall and licked the sole of her foot. Then she was over, sliding down the face of the wall and beginning to run the instant she touched the rocky soil below. This time there was no pursuit.

She followed the trail broken by the day's long hunt, knowing the confused scents would hinder the dogs if they were loosed on her. As she passed them, her hands plucked off berries and the pale, tender shoots of budding spruce. Once, in splashing across a rill, she paused for three quick gulps and a mouthful that she absorbed over the next minutes rather than swallowing. Her pace was not particularly swift, but it was as

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regular as a machine's.

The forest floor paid little mind to dawn or darkness, but the needles of sunlight piercing to the loam were nearly vertical when Lena reached the scene of death and capture. Kort lay huddled, flies black on the raw wounds which crows had already enlarged. Three of the birds croaked angrily from the limb to which Lena's intrusion had sent them, pacing from side to side and hunching their pinions.

Kue-meh's face, undisturbed by the fangs of the pack, bore a look of peculiar kindliness and peace. It was the face with which she had greeted Lena seven years before, less resigned than willing to accept. Lena looked away. It was not that for which she had returned.

"Coo-ee?" she called softly.

The forest grew very silent. Even the crows left off their grumblings.

"Coo-ee?" the girl repeated. The bushes parted as she knew they must, and Chi, then Fall, stood timidly before her. Gurgling sounds that were partly tears and partly words of a language even older than that of the woods folk, Lena threw herself into their arms. She hugged their smooth, furred bodies like the shades of her lost innocence. At last she thrust them back to arm's length. Wiping her face free of the mingled tears, she said, "We must go now, very quickly. There are places in the forest so far away from here that the Others will never come. They will never find us again."

She spoke and led the way into the forest without a glance behind her. Chi followed at once. Faal, a picture of his father now in all but the gray that had tinged Kort's fur, hesitated. As yet, he lacked the consciousness of strength that would let him unconcernedly follow into the unknown. But in a moment he ran to catch the females, and as he shambled on at Lena's side, his fingers began caressing the tawny gold of her hair.

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In the course of her writing career Kate Wilhelm has progressed from being a "story *teller*" (her own phrase at a writer's conference I once attended) to a "manager of words" — T.S. Eliot's phrase — through sheer intelligence and dogged hard work. Verbal lyricism remains either outside her repertoire or not to her taste; what she has done in *The Clewiston Test* as part of her continuing progress is to develop her "telling" into dramatic crosslighting. There are no less than sixty-four changes of point-of-view in the book (I may have missed some) and the crucial questions on which the book turns are questions organic to the crosslighting method: who is sane, who is honest, and whose perceptions are to be trusted. *Test* is a bare book, puzzling perhaps at first reading (it puzzled me) because of the solidity, simplicity, and unusualness of the method, but eventually clear and often very powerful.

There is an eerie idea current in much popular criticism that a critic ought to judge only the "technique" of a novel and not its "content;" yet beyond the point of minimal competence technique *is* content. To judge science fiction by "technique" only is like judging buildings only by whether they remain standing or not; in these

JOANNA RUSS

Books

The Clewiston Test, by Kate Wilhelm, Farrar Straus Giroux, $8.95

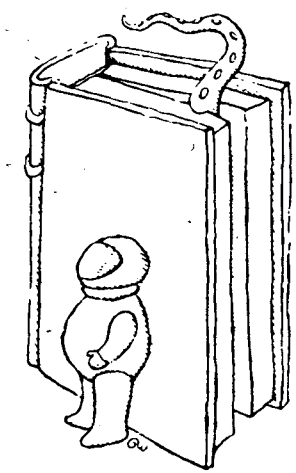
Millennium, by Ben Bova, Random House, $7.95

Star Mother, by Sydney J. Van Scyoc, Berkley Putnam, $6.95

Comet, by Jane White, Harper, $7.95

Cloned Lives, by Pamela Sargent, Fawcett Gold Medal, $1.50

Star Trek: The New Voyages, eds. Sondra Marshak and Myrna Culbreath, Bantam, $1.75



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terms I.M. Pei's NCAR building atBoulder and MacDonald's golden arches are equally valuable. Literature is not only beautiful, like music and architecture; it is also referential, which means that literary criticism inevitably becomes referential also, and hence moral. As George Bernard Shaw once said of plays, mechanical rabbits are fun because they are ingenious, cheap, or resemble real rabbits; but real rabbits appeal to entirely different concerns and provoke entirely different questions. You don't, for example, praise a live rabbit for ingeniously looking like a live rabbit; you expect it to; after all, it *is* a rabbit. In Shaw's metaphor the artificially constructed commercial work is the wind-up toy, the organic work of art the live animal. Science fiction, like all literature, is overrun by artificial rabbits; *Test* is one of our very few live rabbits (Kate Wilhelm has in the past written mechanical — though sometimes deeply felt — wind-up rabbits) so criticism from now on will be, among other things, moral.

I have two objections to the book, one minor and technical, one major and non-technical. The technical objection is to the point-of-view changes, which proliferate unnecessarily, even once (for a single sentence) into the mind of a passing waitress. Wilhelm's dramatic crosslighting demands a lot of athleticism in the reader, and these jumping points of view add to the demands; there are also too many spear-carriers unnecessarily identified by name, although these painstaking details among others do make Prather Pharmaceuticals extraordinarily solid. Scenes also often start with the objective camera-eye and then slide into a particular mind; and sometimes shifts occur within paragraphs.

My major objection inevitably takes us outside the book. At first what bothered me was the constriction of the characters' lives; although they are scientists and one of them is a genius, there is no intellectual playfulness here, no culture, no politics, no international affairs, no sports, and hardly any gossip. (This odd deprivation has one effect at least that is fine: The heroine's few escapes into fantasy stand out brilliantly.) Perhaps Wilhelm means to demonstrate the provinciality and deprivation of her scientists' lives; yet narrow-minded people don't really banish all the above from their conversation; they have their own versions of them. The book seems to oversimplify reality for dramatic effect. In another area this is just what the book does, thus turning a qualified social situation into a simpler kind of tragedy and a simpler kind of triumph. I mean

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the heroine's isolation from other women.

Women in the sciences are certainly more isolated from other women than their humanist cousins, but *Test* does not offer this (or any other) explanation for Anne Clewiston's being alone; not only that, the author seems to have deliberately loaded the dice so that her heroine's isolation will be total. A book about a strong, independent, gifted woman who challenges the establishment and her own husband is clearly a feminist book. Yet Wilhelm, writing page after page about her own version of one-half of the feminist equation — that much-misunderstood phrase, "The personal is political" — completely neglects the other half, i.e. solidarity between women. It is no more possible to be a feminist single-handed (or make what is essentially a feminist protest) than it's possible to have a one-woman trade union. Our cultural tradition be-mystifies the question of support and solidarity for everybody but especially so for women; not only can no woman (or man) today succeed in any social protest (including feminism) without support from others, nobody ever could. The official portraits of women artists, for example, as operating in a supportive setting of husbands and male colleagues, tend to censor the importance of female colleagues and female friends, such unlikely-appearing pairs as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Georges Sand, for example, or the very isolated — *but not that isolated* — Emily Dickinson. It was with this quite verifiable historical fact in mind that I read about Anne Clewiston, who is neither a feminist, misinformed about feminism, nor even afraid of it; she seems to live in a world in which it simply does not exist. Now no woman or man in this country can have escaped hearing something, however sketchy, about the women's movement in the last few years, and any white, middle-class woman (I would be presumptuous if I spoke outside my own experience, but this much I know) who is not too far from a big city or a large University can find some kind of support from other women if she chooses to look for it. In *Test* Anne Clewiston hasn't made any such choice, nor do we see for what reasons she might have made it or the information or misinformation she had to base a choice on. In real life it takes time to find the "right" group and feminists are always complaining that the groups they do find are "wrong" — too conservative, too radical, too young, too old, Lesbian, non-Lesbian, too political, too subjective — but Wilhelm's heroine hasn't had this experience, either. If anything,

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Test proposes that an independent woman can expect support *least* from other women; when it comes to the crunch there are three good men who stand up for Anne (her boss, her uncle, and her lawyer) but the women Anne might possibly turn to are as repellent a pair as you will find: a mother so totally destructive that she has openly parted company with reality and a feminist colleague (ditto) who is an unstable, treacherous Lesbian and whose thwarted passion for the heroine leads directly to the heroine's being presumed mad. The one good woman in the book is Anne's nurse-companion, but the social distance between them is so great (and so unbreached by either) than only on p. 232 does the loyal Ronnie finally ask her employer if anything's wrong. This is not to say that Wilhelm is obliged to show her heroine being supported by other women, but the sheer possibility doesn't seem to enter the book's social calculus at all.

In a novel that depends heavily on social analysis, conventional or ambiguous material is fatal. There is some of this in *Test*. The novel indicates at one point that Deena the Lesbian is not typical of feminists but gets the dynamics of her c.r. group wrong; any leader who was "sharp" with a member would face at the very least the flat rebellion of the other members, probably enriched by three hours' kvelling about elitism. Moreover it's not clear whether Deena is a Lesbian becuase she's crazy or crazy because she's a Lesbian. The humane view, of course, would be that it's the repression of her Lesbianism that's driven her crazy, just as the humane view of the heroine's mother — explicity put forward by good Uncle Harry — is that it's the suppression of her intelligence that's made her bitchy. Since we never see the dynamics either of Deena's madness or the mother's frustration (how? why? who did it to them? in what ways?) we are left with unpleasant people who can be interpreted in the conventional way, i.e. it's their own fault. I think Anne's alcoholic boss fails in the same way; the book tells us his life was ruined by being kicked upstairs into an uncongenial job, but what we see dramatically is a spineless, whining hypochondriac. One can only conclude that his alcoholism, his hypochondria, and his acceptance of the uncongenial job, are all caused by his weak character.

It is, I think, in the details of the business at Prather, and especially in Anne's relation to her husband, that the novel is most solid, though even here the reasons why the Symons marriage breaks up shift bewilderingly. Wilhelm seems to be saying in one place that

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sexual dissatisfaction causes feminism, in another that Anne's confinement at home after her accident gives her a taste of the life most wives lead all the time, and still elsewhere that she blames her husband for the car accident. After the rape the question is no longer up for grabs, of course, and I especially liked Anne's "sly" look at her boss (she asks him if a man can rape his own wife and Goodguy answers no) and the theatrical, self-aggrandizing nature of her husband's grief, a masculine phenomenon insisted upon by such diverse works as Samuel Delany's *Triton* and "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman." Much in the novel is sheer tour-de-force, especially the domestic detail of Anne's surroundings. Emphasizing the contradictions in the book only points up that contradictions are inevitable when you deal with real, difficult subject-matter. Ms. Wilhelm is blasting out living space in the middle of solid rock, something not one book in ten thousand has the nerve to do. Confusion is inevitable; what's exhilarating is that the process is nonetheless alive and continuing.

Ben Bova's *Millennium* is an artificial rabbit. My copy tried to eat real grass in the back yard and died. It's a slick, optimistic replay of 1776 in which a predictably humane-and-decent society on the moon revolts against a predictable dystopia on earth. The moon society is half American and half Russian, which gives the author a chance for a lot of International Understanding (there are, luckily, no Maoist Chinese practicing self-criticism in the corridors) with a lot of sloppiness in the beginning, great wedges of exposition, and some Sears Roebuck eroticism that annoyed me until I realized the author was simply trying to trot out his characters as fast as possible (this is done by listing the features that make the women sexy and grading the men on degrees of being "in condition"). The story that unrolls after this, however, is slick enough to be fun, and even moving if you can forget that its assumptions are more-than-twice-told tales. I'm tempted to call the novel "Executive to the Stars" but that only pegs the school to which it belongs, and however stodgy the school (and the ideas thereof) the book is an OK, intelligent workout for an idle hour or for people who are terrified of live books.

In *Star Mother* Sydney Van Scyoc has invented the first hybrid Gothic-cum-science fiction, a combination quite as horrid as it sounds. The heroine, a Peace Corps type, is your routine sheltered, spunky, and incompetent miss;

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there is a dark, arrogant, brusque, mysterious hero who lives in a castle, hauls the heroine about, and refuses to answer her questions; heck, there's even a loyal housekeeper.* The hero and heroine do not get married and there is no glamorous and wicked other woman for the heroine to be jealous of, but there is your usual heroine's alter ego, who is carefully developed through chapter after chapter only to get killed as a stand-in for the heroine (who blunders badly the only time she actually does something on her own). In fact there are two alter egos, one of which kills the other — a worn-out drudge from a Fundamentalist community that kills its mutants (brilliantly novel, eh?) and a rebellious girl from a savage tribe who has a bad case of pelt-envy (males are very hairy on this world) and wants to be a man. By contrast Jahna, the heroine, is presented as a free, independent, but not aggressive or hostile, representative of liberated womanhood, who is going to raise the status of the native savage women because she is beautiful (!), intelligent (an assumption not borne out by her actions), and will provide a figurehead around which they can rally. The book's idea of how to make men value you is to be very pretty and have lots of babies (though not, on this world, in the usual way), an idea you'd think the last eight thousand years of human history would have thrown a teeny bit into doubt, but *Star Mother* is a rabbit so absurdly artificial (purple and with pom-poms) that only those who try to eat it or breed it will be disappointed. It's a lively, silly, colorful, wholly derivative book, with some promising biological inventions the author never really develops. I don't actually mind the book itself, but I do have unsettling visions of inspired adolescents among the readership typing out mss. like "Governess to the Stars" and "Interstellar Nurse." Star-executives have to know a considerable amount about the real world, even if such knowledge doesn't include anything about people. Star-governesses need to know (and do) nothing.

A wind-up rabbit that doesn't even go is Jane White's *Comet,* a dreadfully pretentious re-play of the birth of Christ and early Christianity in which everybody speaks Basic Peasant ("A baby. There has never been a baby here. Not even in the village, not now. It is forbidden") and they are all so simple and elemental that they've forgotten the word for fucking, a

*Russ, "Someone's Trying To Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: the Modern Gothic" J. Popular Culture, Spring 1973, q.v.

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proposition I absolutely refuse to believe. *Comet* is a post-holocaust world, the holocaust in this case having been the dearth of raw materials needed for a machine civilization. Thus the populace lives in squalor and the rulers run tanks and planes (on what, for Heaven's sake?) and wear plastic clothes, apparently having located their hideout over a petroleum mine. The book has a terminal case of Archibald MacLeish-itis, i.e. the idea that you can arbitrarily substitute any patch of history for any other because the Eternal Verities make them identical. One would expect this book to come from Doubleday in one of its barrel-scraping moments, but even books like *Pig World* and *Complex Man* hop erratically and luridly about the room; *Comet* (from *Harper & Row*, of all people!) just lies there with its gears grinding. It is a portentously dull, thoroughly bad book.

To drop the rabbit metaphor, Pamela Sargent's *Cloned Lives* is an interesting and promising first novel, sketchily and badly put together from episodes that first appeared elsewhere. The first hundred and twenty pages are jumpily expository and full, with no indication of how the violent millennial riots of the beginning ever lead to the rational, affluent, decent world of the middle and end. Once we get into the adult lives of the six clones, however, the author reveals a talent for tracing the psychology and human relations of her characters, projecting a kind of ideal decency that is pleasant and refreshing. Much in the book is clumsy (like the technology, which seems stuffed in by afterthought) but there is a kind of innocence which carries much before it. The clones, I am glad to say, turn out to be different people, realistically bothered by their notoriety and the peculiarity of their birth; despite the excitingly revolutionary and inflammatory claims made by the various epigraphs, the book shows not big changes but little ones; its world is quiet, low-keyed, and not flamboyant, but often authentically different.

The Kindly Editor sent me *Star Trek: the New Voyages* with the comment that *Fantasy and Science Fiction* has an obligation to cover "one of these" books. But *New Voyages* isn't one of these books; it's neither about the program (like *The Making of Star Trek*) or a novelization by a professional writer of produced or unproduced scripts. *Voyages* is a collection of fan fiction, i.e. a ten-year-old's toy rabbit made very carefully with love and effort but a lot of the little

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wheels and things got left on the kitchen table and when you try to make it stand up it collapses. Most of the authors are ignorant of such fictional niceties as point of view, to mention only one mess-up, and the strain of reading stories that can't or won't distinguish between the television medium and written prose narrative finally did me in. I survived part-way into each story (considering this better than not reading any of them) and if you think this impairs my credentials as a critic, remember the story of the playwright who fell asleep during a neophyte's play, and afterwards, to the young person's pained protest, replied, "Young man, sleep *is* an opinion." What seems to be wrong with the stories (besides their technical faults, which I would deal with in a writing class — where some of the authors might get A's, by the way — but not here) is that they mechanically re-create the stalest trivia of the show — its names, its star dates, its log, its mannerisms — without in the least trying to replicate the essence of its appeal. The best story I've ever seen about *Star Trek* (which carefully avoids trying to ritualistically re-create the superficialities) is James Tiptree's "Beam Us Home," which can be found in his *Ten Thousand Light Years From Home* (Ace, 95¢). I recommend it to the Little League writers in *New Voyages,* as a way of learning how to play with the big folks.

NOTE: Fan fiction is extremely interesting as a sociological phenomenon, sociological value being — of course — separate from literary value. Analyses along many dimensions are needed, e.g. the perennial interest in Spock, the s.f. themes that crop up, the kinds of alien worlds created, the imaginary-real interface, and so on. Some comments on the sexism of *New Voyages,* especially interesting because the editors and most of the writers are women, appears in a pamphlet distributed and written by Joyce Rosenfield at the Science Fiction Fair held May 22, 1976 for the Children's Brain Diseases Foundation in California. This is only one possibility and perhaps the most obvious. *New Voyages* represents the taste of its editors, and is not (I would assume) representative of the range or typicality of fan fiction. Some popular culture scholar might plod through the fanzines in search of all this material. As an old *Trek* watcher I would be interested in the results of such a search...as long as somebody else did the reading.

—*Joanna Russ*

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An evocative story about a farm of the future and its unusual crop from a new writer who tells us of himself: "College in New Jersey, a year of graduate school at the U. of Michigan, followed by nearly a year hitchhiking through Europe. Returned to the states to co-edit and write for a consumer newsletter. Left that and was hired as a production editor in a large publishing house. My one ambition is to write. I spend 3-6 hours a night at it. Friends say I'm well disciplined; for me it's an act of love."

Moses

by KEN WISMAN

He is a wanderer, and his journey has just begun. It starts here, in a place verdant with spring, in a valley green and fresh and pure with new beginnings. He thinks he is on a short adventure, a youthful fling before settling into the humdrum of everyday existence. But the vale he has entered will confirm another destiny; it will send him on a search that will not end till he draws his final breath.

He has traveled seven weeks beginning the day the voice grew undeniable. The voice. It whispered and teased, it pleaded and intimidated, it blew along the soles of his feet with a touch light as laughter. And it created an itch that could only be scratched by the dust of paths and the pavement of roads.

When he set out, riding his thumb, hopping the rails, the voice was not quieted. The call grew even louder, and only when he found himself in the valley did the summons cease. His name was Jesse Peregrine. The first day he pitched his tiny tent near an old tumble-down shack and lay listening to the rain and wind. By nightfall the clouds had cleared, revealing a moon risen high and silver-white between the mountains. Jesse walked along the foot of the heights toward the twin peaks and the solemn moon.

Suddenly, with a dreamlike luminescence, he saw wings glide

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across the sky. The wings were larger than a bird's, and the soft silver-cream moonlight shown through them. The single pair were joined by another, and they danced like a vitalized mist, like smoke breathed with life. Around the moon they spun, and he watched in joy and fear. When the couple vanished, Jesse ran shaking to his tent and fell into a sleep filled with unremembered dreams.

The following day Jesse awoke and explored. In the valley's center there grew a field of young green plants. He felt drawn to these plants, and as he walked through the fields, he noticed that they sprouted in rough rows as though planted. Yet the valley had long been deserted.

He wandered between the rows bending occasionally to inspect a sprout. And once, as he was bending, he saw an old, brown sandal carved from ancient leather. But when Jesse reached toward the sandal, it disappeared. Remembering the winged figures, he ran to the edge of the field. A voice called; Jesse turned. And he knew in that moment all he need do was deny it, walk out between the twin peaks, and the voice would crack, the itch would fade, and the illusions would vanish forever.

Jesse returned to the field. All around, the land wavered like air heated in an August sun. For an instant, he saw the plants stir — push upward at an unbelievable rate. Shaking his head in fear, the vision faded. Again the land began to undulate, and the plants pushed upward on thick green stalks. The leaves closed around, threatened to pull him under. But the sound of waves washed through the leaves and drew away his fears.

In the mist of that swirling sea, drops of light spun out in a comet's tail, whirled into a vortex, and coalesced. They formed an old wrinkled face the color of copper and gold. On the old man's chin the beads of light gathered into a dew and fell in streams — a beard as white and fine as a red roe's tail, but long and deep and full. Some of the drops continued down to fashion a body. Though tall and thin, the ancient form radiated power and energy.

Throwing back his head, the old man laughed a deep, robust laughter. "I see the plants have trapped another wanderer," he said, "the first this spring. These plants are etched deep down with a story, and if you are willing, they shall share it. The tale is repeated to all who wash into this valley, to all who wish to hear it. Listen only with your ear and eye and it will still be a tale well-told."

The old man faded, leaving only his voice. And his words spun out into long bright fibers; the sea

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became a loom, and the fibers wove into a pattern of places and faces and all that the old man described.

My friends called me Moses, old man Moses. The last nine of my seventy-two years were spent pretty much alone. I had no wife, no life-long companion. My woman was those twin peaks and the valley below. In winter time, those two perfectly rounded mountains were covered with snow untouched, pure as a virgin's bosom. In spring, nature dressed her in the green gown of a sophisticate. Autumn, nature gauded her like a gypsy whore.

No, for a time I had all the woman I needed right here in these mountains and this valley, living the perfect life of a peace-won hermit. It was several years before I ever saw a flesh-and-blood woman. And this is her tale, as well as mine, and the tale of her two companions — the first three wanderers to wash into this valley.

Seven years had gone by since I started my farm. The year was '97, easing up on a new century. And me? I was 69, easing into the mystic age of 70.

It was spring, one day before planting. As was my custom, I took down the guitar, sat strumming on the cabin porch, and sang to the waiting fields. I believed if you filled new-thawed ground with music the plants would dance in the summer winds.

It was an old song I sang that day. Long ago, when I was washing over the country with a mouse, we concocted the words between us.

Don't know where I'm goin',
Don't know where I've been,
Seen the wrong side of lonely,
The dark side of sin.

Pack'd my world away,
In a paper sack.
Hit the dusty road one day,
Never turning back.

Before I could continue, a great roar and popping reverberated through the valley. Standing, I was just in time to see a classic, gas-eating, tire-rolling Rolls Royce come rattling through the mountain cleavage. Three kids got out: a girl, two boys, all in their early twenties.

"Haven't seen a car like that in 25 years," I said. It was black and shiny like polished coal.

One of the boys poked his friend. "It cost more fatback than you'll ever burn."

"I'll bet," said I. "You people lost?"

The boy who had answered, smirked. "No," said he. "We

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washed in to do some squatting. Our toss is nature — mountains and sky — you know, waldo?"

The one talking was short, plump, and spoke in a high, lisping pitch. The other boy was tall, powerfully built, and moved with authority. Both had beards and hair meticulously groomed. The mouse leaned against the car, trying to look bored. She was tall, willowy, with eyes as green as spring, and hair white as winter. All three were strut-down dressed.

"What are you kids called?" I asked.

The first, the plump one, grinned. "My name's Von Hindenburg. He's Icarus. And she's Kitty Hawk."

"Soars?"

"You know a lot for a zip out here in nowhere," said Von H.

"Don't mind my friend, mister," said Icarus. "He doesn't know how to behave. Do you, zip?" He extended his hand to me; the grip was cold. "Mind if we stay in your valley?"

"Go right ahead. Not my valley anyway."

"We won't do any soaring —" began Icarus.

"What you do is your own business. Just don't force down planes in the valley."

"That's funny, waldo," said Von H. "We'll toss and you do your own. Right, Icarus?"

"Why don't you wash away?" said the tall boy. He turned to me. "We've got some camp equipment. OK if we squat here on the edge of the field?"

"Fine," said I. "Pretty mouse there with you."

The girl pouted at me and flung her long white hair.

"You're gonna be OK, waldo," said Von H. with a smirk.

I turned and walked away.

The following morning I began toting the seedbags up from the basement. They were bursting with life, and I knew we'd spend a good green season together, the flight and I. After hauling all seven sacks outside, I fell exhausted into my rocker — an old man getting older. Fifteen minutes later, Icarus and Von H. sauntered up.

"Afternoon," said Icarus, leaning against a porch post.

"How're you struts getting on?" I asked.

"We're up," grinned Von H.

Icarus glanced at my sacks of seed. "Getting ready to plant?"

"Tomorrow. If the weather's right."

"Mind if we watch?" Icarus asked offhandedly. "I've never seen a farmer work before."

"Not much to watch. I just scatter the seeds."

"Why is it you plow your fields?" Von H. asked suddenly.

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"Ordinary flight'll grow anywhere. Or is yours a special breed?"

"I like to pamper my crops. Take out the weeds, and give them all the nourishment they can draw from the land."

"Nourishment," Von H. snorted, and his companion glared at him. "They got a name for you?"

"Moses."

"Moses!" Von H.'s voice rose an octave. "Because of that *beard?*" He looked at my unkempt silver frazzle with revulsion.

"Well, Moses, we'll see you tomorrow. OK?" Icarus said, grabbing and dragging Von H. away.

I was never a suspicious man by nature, but it would have taken a deaf and blind man not to know those two and the mouse were up to something. Soars used a drug called lighter-than-air, and though it was outlawed, someone always managed to smuggle it from the moon for easy money. Me? I'd have said the hell with it, provided no one got hurt. but that was the rub. Lita was expensive. And soars would hard-stone anyone for fat to buy their cloud.

I turned in early that night and woke with the sun. It was a beautiful day, spring, birds already singing their matins. I just made the fields with the first sack when a broad shadow rippled through the furrows. Icarus strode up, alone.

"Morning," said I, ripping open the bag of seeds. They felt good; strong in my palm. "Where's your friends?"

"Still decked."

He was trying to appear casual in his fancy boots and other finery. But he couldn't help looking down with disgust at the dust collecting on his trousers. Filling my leather pouch, I moved out into the field and scattered the seed.

"That all there is to it?" asked Icarus as he dogged me through the furrows.

"Yes. Pick a fine day, sow, then sit back and watch it grow."

After the last handful was scattered, I brought up another sack. The sun had eased halfway into noon, and the warmth felt good on my back. Icarus was gone, but he returned with a portable stool which he set on the field's edge. Through the morning, into the afternoon, he sat combing his beard, brushing his trousers, and asking his questions.

"Do people visit you much out here?" said he.

"No, not often," I replied. "A man comes in the autumn to bundle away what I harvest."

"I'll bet you make a lot of fatback off this farm."

"Some."

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"Raise good flight?"

"The best."

"Secret formula?"

"Nope."

"Something in the water?"

"Nope."

Oh, he sounded nonchalant all right. Smooth and easy — just making pleasant conversation. I finished up by sunset, my back and bones aching the good ache of fine labor. The moon had already risen full and winter-white between the mountains, and so I bid good-night to my interrogator and made my way back to the cabin.

Once inside I reviewed my conversation with Icarus and concluded that what those three were after wasn't what I had thought at first. Besides l.t.a., soars craved rich things, gaudy things, and they weren't careful how they earned their opulence. I had figured they had figured an old waldo like me would have a stack of fatback hoarded away, and they could stoney me out of it quick and easy. But that wasn't it at all. They were after something else — something fatter.

The next three days it rained hard. And I could feel them, those first seed stirrings, like a long stretch after a dreamy sleep. A chill blew four days, but damned if those seedlings didn't push up a stalk in one week's time. By the eighth afternoon I sat rocking and feeling the first full sound of their essence. Before I could sink too deep in that dream, however, I noticed someone leaning against a porch post, watching. It was the mouse.

"Were you decked?" she asked.

"No."

"You looked far away, like you were strung on flight." She laughed. A pleasant laugh. "How's the crop coming?"

"Fine. I can see flecks of green already."

"Do you give it something special to make it grow so quick?" she asked casually.

It was my turn to laugh. "No, I don't give them a blessed thing except my time."

She came closer, sat on the porch, and faced the mountain peaks. "You like it here?"

"Yes. It's where I intend spending the rest of my days."

"It isn't bad. For a while. But I like to wash." Her voice sounded bored.

"I think you enjoy it here."

"What makes you think so?" she snapped. "You can't see the world from this porch."

"I was a lot like you. A leaf torn off in the wind, blowing where the breeze blew. Did a lot of washing."

"Have you ever strung l.t.a.?"

"No. Never."

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"That's a toss. It's what I want to do always. My life. Cloud, up, dream, lighter-than-air."

"It's dangerous." Oh, I was getting old all right.

"Let's forget the effin' lecture *old man.*" She grinned an unfriendly grin. "I suppose you're going to coze on the perforated stomach l.t.a. will give you."

I changed the subject. "Where's your friends?"

"Icarus and Von H.? They strung cloud and are soaring." Kitty tilted her head to search the sky. The sun caught glinting in her green eyes and reflected moon-bright from her white hair. She was a beautiful girl — fresh and alive as a mountain stream. "Tell me, Moses, how do you get your flight to grow so good?"

"I talk with it."

She laughed, a beautiful tinkling laugh. The girl was an enchantress. I had never told anyone the secret of the flight.

"OK, Moses, you keep it to yourself."

"It's true. And I haven't always spent my life out here."

"Tell me about it, then. The secret too."

"I was born in '27 and left home at fourteen to find my direction on this green earth."

"Ever find it?"

"Yes," said I.

"I think not." Her lips curled teasingly. "I'm sorry, Moses. Go on."

"The first few years I drifted and odd-jobbed. But I've always had an inclination for movements. I found the beats in the '50s, was a 'flower child' in the '60s, and spent half the '70s in a commune. But they all dried up and blew away, and somewhere around my middle years I realized movements weren't the answer. Loning-it was the only way I was going to find my direction on this green earth.

"By the way, I had had a taste of flight in all three movements and was beginning to realize my affinity for the plant."

"Illegal back then, wasn't it? Just like lita is now?" She grinned and chucked a pebble at me. "What did you do next, Moses?"

"Back in New York I got a fare up and sailed on a slow ship so I could get a long look at the sea. In '77 I landed in Europe and rode my thumb north and rode my thumb south — to nowhere in particular. but like all the times before, I would up where something wanted me to be.

"Waking up one day, I realized my heading was east. What the hell, I said, the Mideast, Japan, then south to Australia. but I never got past India. In '83 I was hiking through the mountains and stumbled on a tiny village built by monks. The monk's lives were

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simple: hard work and meditation. Their philosophy was simple too: each man or woman should seek and find his own road. And follow it, wherever it led.

"Their ideas matched mine, so I stayed. And, for a while, I thought I had peace. But I'd meditate into a tranquil state, and something faint would trouble me. Or I'd work content in the mountain fields, and some call would make me restless. For four years I lingered on; then an old newspaper chanced to arrive at the village. On the front page was a headline announcing America had legalized flight. Suddenly, all the pieces fit.

"I bade good-by to the monks, washed out of India and rode my thumb across western Europe. It took a year but I was patient, now that my road, my direction was clear. Part of it was coming back to my soil, the land where I sprang up. A man can leave his soil, but he always leaves his roots behind."

"I'd have stayed if I found *peace,*" said Kitty Hawk with a note of contempt. Her mood was changing.

"Ah, that's the point. I hadn't found *total* peace. That village was only a step or two away. My real direction was the flight."

"What does all this have to do with the secret?"

I saw the impatience in her face, and I felt sad, knowing she had not really listened. "Tell me, have you ever heard the belief that plants are responsive to the emotions in man?"

She shrugged lackadaisically.

"Well, it's always worked the opposite in me, with flight in particular. When I was washing over the country, I'd often wake in the middle of a flight patch. And I could sniff out wild fields if I wanted to. The flight beckoned, but I was too ignorant then to listen closely. The monks' meditation did it. Opened my mind. And I heard it loud, calling me back to my soil and the biggest damned money-making flight farm in these United States.

I floated a loan, started small, and in four years built up this farm into a fifty-a-year operation. The manufacturer's of *Xanadus* and *Miracle Maids* buy all the harvest. I could sell to anyone at a greater profit too — it's that much in demand. And this is the secret I promised. The flight produces a special high, the kind of peaceful high you get from meditating, from diving deep inside and coming on that calm hidden ocean shimmering in the unconscious. It's a high the plants and me concocted between us."

I halted, expecting a response. but Kitty Hawk just sat with her back to me and didn't utter a word.

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"I know what you're thinking: in-gone old man plans things with plants, probably talks with them too. You're right. I do. That's the secret of my success.

"While the first crop was maturing, I sat each day in my rocker and projected my mind over the field. Slowly it began responding. I say 'it' because those plants were part of one essence. Like an ocean they were, dim-shimmering at first, then bright as golden waves. We inched toward communication that year. And after the first frost came, I harvested and made enough to stay alive until the following season —"

By the time I paused for breath, the sun had already dipped behind the cabin. Just then, two dots drifted lazily between the mountains, and glided toward the campsite at the edge of the fields.

"Icarus and Von H.," said Kitty Hawk. "I'll see you, Moses. Wash down to camp one day and say hello."

Without another word, without turning once toward me, she walked across the shadowed fields.

The following day, after chores, I settled into my rocker. The young flight was in a good mood — the sun bright, the earth moist around their roots. They sent me a vision of a woman sitting by a stream — a woman with silver eyes, and silver hair crowned with a crescent moon. The stream turned into strands of flowing hair. And the woman caught it up and ran the hair through a loom, weaving it into slender maidens that rippled away.

I approached the woman in the vision. And she, stretching a hand with long silver fingers, bade me drink. Kneeling, I kissed the singing water. Upon the opposite bank appeared a tall woman covered with sparkling rainbow droplets. A white cloud of hair billowed about her pale form hiding her nakedness and veiling her face in a soft, joyful radiance.

I waded across the singing stream and reached a hand to touch her. But a gust colder than December blew, and suddenly there was a dark woman between us. Her flesh radiated a chill, sickly light, and her face was borne on a sea of black, wild hair.

I stopped, and the dark intruder stepped aside. A second time I moved forward, and the dark woman blocked my way. After the third attempt, she stepped back, and the two women fused. The left half shown with a warming light, the right was dark and cold. And still I sought her, my hand moving slowly like a leaf that seeks the sun. But when I had almost touched her, she threw back her head and laughed a laugh that filled me with joy and sadness, fear and longing.

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Suddenly, the vision popped and I was left staring out at the fields. I wasn't aware then what that young flight was up to. Or perhaps I was stubborn, clinging to my old age and hard-won inner peace.

A couple weeks passed, unsettled weeks. I felt as skittish as I did when I first set off to wandering. The struts remained, sneaking into the fields for soil samples, plucking up young plants to examine. For a long time I put off going down to their campsite, then decided to take Kitty Hawk up on her invitation.

The air dome that the three soars had pitched glittered like ruby-fire in the sunlight. "Hello," said I at the entrance. There was no answer, so I went inside. It was spacious. Large pillows and silk-covered divans were scattered about the outer room. Light-filled globes hung from a ceiling that glistened with mother-of-pearl.

I became aware of voices issuing from a half-open door and heard my name mentioned. Approaching, I saw Kitty Hawk. At that moment she threw back her head and laughed. And the sound of the laughter drew me in.

Suddenly, there was deadly silence. It wasn't difficult to figure out what they had been discussing. Icarus wore a hard look, Von H. smirked, and Kitty's face was lined with guilt.

"Sit," said Icarus with cold politeness. He stood and left the room; Von H. followed.

I sat on a cushion and stared at Kitty.

"What washes you down here?" said she.

"Just wanted to see how you were getting on. Where did Icarus and Von H. go?"

"Soaring."

"Why don't you join them?"

She shrugged. "Maybe I like your company."

"Better than theirs?"

"Icarus and Von H. are my family, my only family. I couldn't score out there." She made a broad gesture. "In the world. It wasn't my toss."

"It wasn't mine either."

"What makes you think I could score out here, in a squatter's hole?"

"No one said you could."

She dropped her challenging tone. "How's the crop coming?"

"Good. It should be the strongest yield yet."

"Still don't want to tell me how you do it?"

"I started to."

"You mean there's more?"

"I told you what I'd done with the plants, but didn't tell you how."

She laughed. The pleasant laugh of two weeks before. "By all *means*, Moses, continue."

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"Well, after the first harvest I saved and stored the seed. And the second season I sowed it and found the plants easier to communicate with. In a way they were the same — they had the same memories. Each afternoon I'd sit rocking and sinking into that sea. There were times when we touched similar experiences, times when we shared alien ones. They knew fear during thunderstorms, love for the sun and soil, hunger and thirst. But they accepted these things as a part of life. Theirs was a pure joy of experience.

"They never really 'talked' to me but sent images into my mind. For the most part, I was left to interpret—unless it was important; then the message came through clear. I, in turn, sent messages to them. Essentially, I got them to alter their chemistry, creating a plant that would impart to the smoker a tiny piece of what I experienced — a bit of the tranquillity I know each spring, summer, and fall."

"You're in-gone, Moses," interrupted Kitty Hawk.

"Hah! Crazy like a fox," said I. "And I'm not through yet. 'Long about the fourth year on my farm, the flight began sending me frightening messages — loud and clear ones. I had cancer. That shattered my peace, and I almost went off the deep end. But the flight brought me back. It showed me that in humankind, cancer sometimes grows in people who are not at one with themselves. This new revelation stunned me, seeing as I thought I had finally won my peace.

"But the flight showed me new places inside, brought me down into them, and between us we altered my body chemistry and did away with the cancer —"

"All right, Moses. Even if you won't share your secrets with me, I'll share mine with you."

I shrugged my shoulders and sighed. "And what would that be?"

"I'll give you the secret of joy — cloud, up dream, lita, lighter-than-air. Icarus and Von H. are washing into the city for a drop at the end of the week. Wash in on the weekend, and I'll string you to a soar."

"I might," said I.

The week passed slowly. I did my chores each morning and each afternoon listened to the flight. It was growing strong, stronger than ever before. The ocean in which I found myself grew deeper, the dreams cast up more vivid. They were still adolescents and sometimes chose to tease me with the vision of the woman and her magic loom. By then I realized what that young flight was up to. They knew love — sun love and rain love — from this they knew love between a man and woman. I told them it was

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ridiculous, an old man like me — the fire was out, the spring run dry.

At week's end I went down to the soar's ruby-dome. Von Hindenburg was standing at the entrance, dressed in a short, red velveteen skirt.

"What washes you in, waldo?" he asked.

"Got a date. With a mouse," said I.

"A *date?*" His face went through a series of exaggerated contortions.

"That's right," said I.

Von H. did a makeshift jig, his pudgy, hairless legs moving clumsily across the ground.

"Kitty Hawk around?"

"I do believe so. I do believe so. Kit-ty, Kit-ty, Kit-ty Hawk," Von H. sang.

Icarus burst from the dome. "What're you effin' doing?" he asked the jigging Von H. with disgust.

"We have a visitor. Claims he has a *date.* With a mouse. With our dandy lit-tle Kit-ty Hawk."

"Why don't you effin' wash?" Icarus snapped irritably. Von H. folded his arms defiantly, but the jig disintegrated into a few faltering steps. "Afternoon, Moses," said Icarus.

"Afternoon."

"You came to see Kitty?"

"That's right."

"Von H. and I were just going into town. Can we pick anything up for —"

"No," said I, cutting him short. "Thanks, anyway. I provision up once or twice a year." That was a lie. But I wasn't about to tell him the fifth crop of flight taught me how to absorb energy direct from the sun. Water and a little food was all I needed anymore.

"Go inside if you like," said Icarus.

Von H. giggled. "A toss for each, and for each his own toss."

"Go inside, Moses," repeated Icarus. "We'll see you later."

Von H. gave a limp wave good-by.

I went into the ruby-dome. Kitty looked up from the divan where she was reading. "Have you come to soar?"

"Yes."

She studied me from the corners of her eyes. "You're not afraid?"

"No."

"You're in-gone." She laughed, then rose. "You'll need wings." Kitty glided through the doorway into the inner room and returned balancing a fourteen-foot span of feathered wings. "If you took lita without these, you'd just float in the air, or get pushed wherever the wind felt like pushing you. Know how to work them?"

"I can learn."

"Let me get mine." Kitty

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returned with a pair of beautifully hand-crafted silver wings. "They were a present. From an admirer. And they cost a lot of fat too. Now, you slip your arm under the strap and grasp the leather thong. Pull down and push up like this."

I worked my gilded wings. "Nothing to it. I'm ready."

"Wait. You never string lita without stringing flight first. It intensifies the experience."

"All right. But *that* I can supply. I've got some stored from last year's crop. If you want to try it."

"Let's wash."

We went to my cabin, and I produced a bag of vintage flight. Getting down the old meerschaum, I stuffed the bowl and lit it. I only pretended to draw the smoke in, opening my mind instead to the waiting sea.

"I'll bet you string flight all the time," said Kitty between inhales.

"No. Don't have to. I string my flight in other ways."

She watched me through the curling billows of blue smoke. The bowl, a considerable amount, was finished. I was curious to see what effect it would have on Kitty. The flight was sraight, sixth year, and very strong.

"Now the cloud," she said, detaching a leather pouch from her belt.

I held out my palm, and she sprinkled some silver dust.

"Swallow it."

I did. "Any idea how this stuff works?"

"No. We'll leave it to the zips to figure out."

We went outside. The lighter-than-air took effect quickly. I was floating up, a bubble, a feather in the wind. Trying my golden wings, I only managed to tumble over and over, like an acrobat in slow motion. Kitty circled as I ascended, her laughter like the wind.

"No," she called. "Spread them out and stabilize. Then, when you pull down, pull back a little."

I followed her instructions and, awkwardly, began to move forward.

"Follow me," she called.

We moved off together, I traveling by inches, she graceful as a falcon. I could see her eagerness to be away and soaring on her own. But she kept close, probably half out of amusement. We winged toward the twin mountains.

"There are good air currents ahead. We can soar all day." Her words drifted over on a cloud.

The flight was rapidly flowing into my mind. I forgot the pinions were a machine; my arms melted into feathers, my body sprouted wings. I squawked like a bird into the valley below.

"You're in-gone," laughed Kitty Hawk. "You're doing good."

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The mountains, round and garbed in green, rose beneath us.

"Breath of gods," said Kitty Hawk. And suddenly she was lifted away, soaring high to a silver speck in the sky. Then, just as suddenly, she shot down, looping past me — once, twice, three times — and swooped over the valley floor.

I hung, a gull on a string, suspended over a windless sea. There was beauty here. The feeling of isolation — freedom from objects, from gravity, from life and death. I felt the suspension of all things — the planets, the stars — and felt the power that held them aloft.

"Follow me," said Kitty Hawk, appearing beside me.

I wasn't even sure she had mouthed the words. The flight was taking us up and tugging us down to mingle with the ocean of green below. Kitty soared high; I followed. Higher and higher we went, bursting through a thick cloud and still higher — until my lungs ached. Then down we rushed, Kitty fifty feet in front. She looped, and I matched her. She looped, and I again. The wind sang past my ears; the ground circled, rushed closer. Kitty flung out her wings, and I mine; we sailed across the valley floor above the stalks of green.

Laughter floated past me, like spindrift from the sea. The flight was laughing, the mountains and valley, too. And I laughed, skimming beside her over the waves of green.

"You're doing good," she called and arched into the sun.

I followed, my wings catching the fire of the golden light. We circled to the mountains, dove again into the valley, the sea, and the spoondrift laughter. I don't know how many times we splashed through the valley, or how many games of tag we played. but the moon rose full, and we found ourselves hovering between the mountains, watching the chalk-white orb.

"When we soar," whispered Kitty Hawk, "we shed all our restrictions. Everything that binds us below." A silver garment fluttered in the air, fell tumbling like a stricken bird between the dark mountains below.

"Everything?" said I, laughing, and shed my clothing too.

I did not know if it was the flight or the moonlight, but Kitty Hawk shone luminescent — white as the mountains in winter when morning breaks on the icy peaks. My own body glowed, no longer an old man's body, but the flesh of the youngster buried in worn skin. Kitty Hawk tumbled over slowly, back to the earth, floating dandelion fluff in the breeze. but she kept just ahead of me, laughing

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and circling. Suddenly she was still, and I fluttered down to cover her body with my own.

"My winged god." Her voice was half mocking.

With the first thrust of my thighs, she glided forward. "Moses, I'm waiting," she called and laughed aloud. I chased her and caught her, but my thighs thrust her forward again. After the third time, she enveloped me in her silver wings.

"Not like that. Like this. Like this." Her whisper washed into the valley below.

There were times when flight allowed me to see into man's essence — as clear as the seas when they were first put on this earth. What I saw in Kitty was warmth and softness and joy — the pure half of my haunting vision. Kitty knew and for moments felt it too. She swam in the green sea, and they exchanged words and dreams. What was said was never told me.

We flew down into the valley, alighting in front of the ruby-dome, and the spell dissolved as soon as I touched ground. Icarus and Von H. were lounging at the dome's entrance.

"Enjoy yourselves?" asked Icarus sarcastically.

Von H. eyed our naked bodies with an exaggerated stare. "Out soaring?" he said, giggling.

"That's right," Kitty Hawk replied and disappeared inside the dome.

"Lovely evening for a soar," Von H. said. "Was it your first time, waldo?"

"Yes," said I. "Thanks for the use of the wings." I took them off and handed them to Icarus.

"It certainly is pleasant to try one's wings on occasion — even if one is a bit *old*," said Von H.

"I better be going."

"Washing so soon? You must stay for a pleasant coze, perhaps a drop of flight to relax, or a snack."

"Don't think I'm dressed for dinner," said I, walking away.

Their laughter followed me back to my cabin.

Summer wore on, eased into autumn. I heard nothing from the ruby-dome. Occasionally there were two or three specks soaring over the mountains, but no one came near — until one afternoon I stood hoeing in the fields.

It was a hot humid day, breezeless and threatening rain. I spied a huge thunderhead billowing over the twin mountains and was thinking of heading in when two figures swooshed out of the blue. It was Icarus and Von H. on wings of black and red. They flew so low I ducked instinctively. The laughter trailing was drowned in a thunderclap that rolled through the valley.

I looked back at the mountains.

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Lightning danced down the peaks on white, crackling legs. Against the chaos I saw the two soars dive again and come skirring through the valley. Turning, I ran.

There was the sound of wind rushing past their wings, and I ducked low. Icarus passed me on the right, Von H. on the left. They dipped low, their wings scything off the stalk tops, cutting wide swaths in the broiling sea of green. I gathered shorn flight as I ran, stooping and scooping and cradling it in my arms. Thunder rolled down again, shaking the valley. Then came the rush of wings.

Huddled against the ground, I heard them pass. Rain splattered my clothing, soaked the soil to mud. For a moment I smelled the green earth, tasted it rich and gritty. Then I was up, running as hard as I could. Mud sucked at my sandals and tugged them off. With naked feet I rushed into the open. But the two soars didn't come again.

Thunder rattled the shack as I closed the door behind. That night I dried my clothes and the gathered flight on the hearth.

The rain lasted a week and fell so heavily, I could not see past the window. I worried that the entire crop would be leveled. But at week's end I sloshed out into the field, and the flight, every stalk of it, stood, and stood a foot taller.

I settled into my life again — morning chores, afternoon conversations. A surprising thing had happened: the flight, now easing through maturity, no longer sent visions. They began pulling up words, forming sentences that flashed in my mind like neon signs. And the sea of flight was no longer calm and peaceful, but reflected my own growing anxieties. One afternoon I sat rocking, and we got into a heated discussion.

"We have no concept of good and evil," the neon sign said. "There is no such conflict within us. We fulfill our function — life — and die."

"Sounds a bit dull to me."

"And we don't seek extra food or water. Nor do we desire shelter or comfort. We just know life in its essence."

"Aha!" said I. "So do I, at times."

"But you're the exception to the rule, Moses. We were made simply to exist, man was made to destroy."

I argued up a storm, listing man's accomplishments. This flight was too strong. It was more than a struggle of ideas: I was wrestling to hold onto my identity as a human being.

A voice cut through my mind. "Old waldo sits cozing to himself." It was Von H.

"Evening," I said, waking from my dream.

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"Evening, Moses," said Icarus. Both stepped into the light cast from the cabin doorway. They were strut-down dressed — Icarus in black velveteen suit and flowing scarf, Von H. in red silk and jangling boots.

"What washes you in?" I asked.

"Just for a coze, Moses," said Icarus. "About your flight. We're interested in how you make it so good."

"Secret," I replied.

"It's a secret," said Von H. taking one step forward, the bells jangling on his boots. "It's a secret. You should share secrets with friends."

"You're not my friends."

"Tell your friend Kit-ty, then."

"I did."

"Moses." Icarus interrupted in a cold voice. "There's a big company back East who'd pay big fat to know your methods and mass produce your kind of flight. Why don't you share your secret so the *four* of us can live easy —"

"I make enough."

"But *we* don't have enough," said Von H. "Soaring, and washing, and clothing burn a lot of fat."

"That's not my problem."

"But it is, zip." Von H.'s baby fat face contorted grotesquely. "You see it is your problem now! Now! You see!"

"Shutup," said Icarus. "Look, Moses, we don't want to hard-stone an old man like you. Just give us what we need, and we'll wash. No trouble."

"All right," I said. "Tomorrow."

"*Tomorrow?*" Von H. laughed. "I can't show you tonight. It's getting dark, and what I have to show you is out in back of the fields through the mud."

Unconsciously, Von H. brushed at his jangling boots. "How do we know you won't wash out of here?"

"This is my home. Where would I go? Besides two young struts like you could catch me quick enough."

Icarus' black eyes regarded me with no more emotion than a snake's. "Just what is it you're going to show us tomorrow?"

"A new chemical. I hid it underground, just beyond the fields."

"Tomorrow, then." Icarus turned to go.

Von H. stood for a moment. He jigged a few times in his jangling boots, pulled a jeweled blade from his sleeve, and held it glittering in the moonlight. Grinning, Von H. turned and rushed away to catch his friend.

I didn't sleep at all that night; the flight and I talked long and hard beneath the moon.

"Moses, yours is a species filled with dissatisfactions."

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"How is that?" said I.

"You have an inclination toward good and an inclination for evil. And when you choose one way, the other fights against it. There is no way to resolve the conflict."

"Maybe you're right. And could be you're wrong. Perhaps that resolution will be the last step we face."

"And there is no love of life in your species. If you loved life, you would play like little children, experiencing it, good and bad, for the purity of the experience."

"And you?"

"You said it yourself. Ours is a pure joy of experience. Man does not like to be hungry or thirsty, but we accept these things as a part of life to be savored in the experience of existing."

"It sounds — cold, at times."

"Only because you lack the words to express it."

We talked long and hard, and through it all I was buoyed up in the old feelings of serenity. And I knew what we would do, the flight and I, grown strong and sleepless beneath a blood-red moon.

When the sun blinked above the twin mountains, the flight informed me of the soar's approach. Icarus grinned, Von H. leered, Kitty Hawk stood in-between. I stared at her long and soft from my rocker.

"Why not?" she asked, meeting and holding my gaze. Her face was a mask.

"Morning, Moses," said Icarus.

"Morning, waldo," said Von H.

"You know, I've been thinking this whole night," said I. "Those big eastern companies would probably pay a helluva lot of fatback for my secret. I *am* getting old and can't keep up the farm."

"That's good coze," said Icarus.

"I've been thinking a partnership would be a good idea after all. but let's seal the bargain. A friendly string before we wash out to the field."

"Sure," said Icarus. As he moved forward, Von H. clutched at his arm. "Wash!" said the tall boy swinging viciously. He walked inside. Kitty came up behind, and following reluctantly, Von H. hung back by the open door.

"It's this year's crop," said I, pointing to the dried flight strung across the hearth. Taking down the meerschaum, I crumbled a leaf into the bowl.

"You first, waldo," said Von H.

I strung a deep one, holding it as long as I could, then passed the pipe to Icarus. "Go ahead. Best flight you'll ever string. Seven years in the making."

I led them through the rippling waves of green grown high — three

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feet over our heads. Each step took us higher, immersed us deeper in that sea of green. I reached out slowly, touched each of their minds so lightly they didn't know they were being touched. And I began planting my seeds.

"Like them. It would be good. Sun and rain. Needing nothing."

"Never mind the coze," snapped Icarus. "Show us the chemical."

And I led them into the fallow fields where the sun had turned the soil to dust and crumbling clods. They paused often to brush the dirt from their expensive clothing.

"Hurry it up, zip," Von H. said. "It's hot out here."

I brought them through the arid fields to the mountain-fed rill flowing across the valley. And it sang as we approached. It sang like I had never heard before, like the river of life, like the loom-maiden's stream.

The flight was seeping into their minds. Except for Kitty Hawk, they didn't know it. She watched me. Our eyes locked, and for a moment we were soaring over the twin mountains again. She was back in the sea, as fresh and pure as the first oceans that washed this earth. And she knew where I was leading them.

"We can't cross that," said Icarus. The hardness was gone from his voice. It lulled soft, blended with the song of the stream. Giggling, Von H. took off his boots and jangled them at the flow. Kitty Hawk balanced herself and removed her silver boots. Her tinkling laugh gave voice to the stream.

"OK," said Icarus. "But if there's any digging to do, you'll do it, old man."

I led them across the mountain rill, wading deep in a current that sang and swirled thick as melted sugar and soft as rolling cloud. Across, the soil lay rich and loamy. Scented moss grew thick over the rounded, mounded bank swollen with new birth. Dripping, their clothes forgotten, Icarus and Von H., with Kitty in-between, stood atop the bank.

I planted more seeds: "It's what you believe and cannot believe. It's what you fight and give in to that pulls you under."

"Cut the effin' coze, old man," said Icarus. "Where's the secret?"

"I talk with it. It talks with me. You can feel it now, can't you?"

"Yes," said Kitty Hawk. "Yes."

Von H. fluttered nervously. "The old waldo is in-gone," he said. "In-gone."

"We made changes together," I continued. "I changed it, made it more powerful. It changed me."

"What's the coze, old man?" mocked Icarus.

"I don't eat much food

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anymore. Get most of my needs from the sun and rain —"

"He's in-gone," shouted Von H.

"Look at your hands and feet."

Von H. gasped, turned pale.

"Part of what's happening is because you believe it can happen. Smoking the flight did that. Made you part of the green sea. And part of what's happening is because I am willing it to happen."

"Omigod!" wailed Von H. He stared at his elongating fingers, tried to scrape off the tiny white buds. Icarus glared in hatred. He attempted to step toward me, ripping up his rooted legs and shedding thick red sap onto the ground. Kitty stood silent, her eyes to the sun.

"Kitty Hawk," I whispered.

She bent forward, stretched her arms out and out into green whip branches.

Icarus laughed. "You won, old man. You won, old man." He repeated it over and over until the thick bark surrounded his mouth in a deep black yowl.

I quickly left, my mind and will the only things that kept me from changing too. And my identity was safe in this life as I left that green place by the stream.

There was an eighth crop of flight, and when I sat rocking on the porch listening, I felt a new force swirling in that ever-deepening sea: an aggressive force, and a passive force, and a checking force running in-between. And while I sat lonely through the winter, I added a verse to the spring planting song.

> One touch of evil,
> One breath of good,
> Sell my soul to the devil,
> Or God, if I could.

I sang it often to the ninth, the last crop of flight.

The old century was dying, easing into a new one. I would

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never see it; the flight told me. But I wanted to leave my story behind for those who inkling that their paths are not the well-worn ones other men have traveled. So we concocted the tale between us, the flight and I, etching it down deep in their genes. They'll pass it on as long as this valley is green and there is someone to listen.

And me? I passed on before the first frost took the ninth crop. And when I died, only when I died, I surrendered my identity and joined the oak and the pussy willow, and found my place with the weeping willow in-between.

Jesse stretched, blinking in the late-afternoon light as though waking from a deep sleep and a deeper dream. He felt exhausted. As the tale had progressed, he was drawn into the experience of each character and each had touched some empathetic force within.

Jesse left the fields, and the flight diminished to tiny green splashes on the land. He went to the campsite, packed up his belongings, and set out across the vale. Fording the stream, Jesse located the pussy willow upon the rounded bank. Delicate catkins lined its branches. Nearby, he came upon the oak, its massive trunk shorn and jagged by lightning.

Between them was the weeping willow, and running his hands gently over the trunk, he discovered letters in the bark. It was a name, Ruth, carved there by some unknown hand and etched so deep that not even a hundred years had erased it. Beside the weeping willow, he found the evergreen, standing tall and lean, smelling of August spice and the crisp cold of December.

Breaking off a tiny sprig and placing it in his pocket, Jesse Peregrine hefted the pack onto his back and set off through the twin mountains to find his road.

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SEE LOGAN RUN

This is Logan.
Logan kills.
Logan kills people.
Logan kills people over thirty.
They are runners.
Now Logan is a runner.
Logan must be killed.
See Logan run.

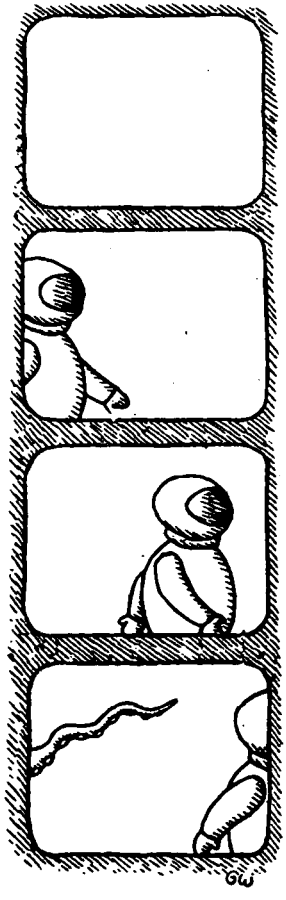
That's really not fair, I must admit. *Logan's Run* may be a bit simple minded as to plot, but there are compensations. So let's get the plot out of the way first.

I read the novel by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson back in 1967 when it first appeared; I remember being impressed at a certain originality of approach, if not concept, but that's about all I remember, except that it seemed very much a product of the youth-oriented '60s.

That factor has been soft-pedaled in the screenplay; it would have dated the movie badly had it been emphasized. Unfortunately, there are several other aspects of the narrative that have almost become cliches, particularly in s/f film. There is the restrictive future society that prohibits something that we take as an inalienable right: having children (*ZPG*), mating by choice (*THX 1138*), or, in this case, living past the age of 30. The City is a closed environment, closed from

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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the supposedly ruined outside; the inhabitants are maintained in a life of luxury and pleasure, but must voluntarily take part in a sort of ritualized lottery at age 30 in which most are killed and a few are "renewed"; what the innocent hedonists don't know is that nobody is renewed and all are killed to preserve population balance.

Logan is a Sandman; his job is to track down "runners," those who try to avoid the deadline. Through a complex series of events, he becomes a runner himself and tries to find "sanctuary," a place that shelters runners. With the inevitable female tagging along, he makes his way through the bowels of the city, facing various dangers such as a demented robot whose job *had* been freezing sea-food protein but who now just freezes anybody that comes along.

Second major cliche: Logan and Jessica *break out,* and there is the usual huge, blobby, red sun breaking through the haze and great chords of music signifying The Outside, which is, of course, perfectly livable if anybody had bothered to look.

Third major cliche: beating their way through the wilderness, they come across Washington, D.C., so covered in ivy that it makes Sleeping Beauty's palace look cultivated. There they find an Old Man, and decide to take him back with them to Prove It.

But nobody believes them (surprise!); in the process of trying to re-escape, Logan manages to blow up the whole works and everybody's Out.

From the above, you might gather I'm being negative about *Logan's Run.* Nope. I loved it. The problem is, gentle reader, explaining to you why I loved it.

It's a problem because it involves that aspect of cinema that is hardest to put into words. The plot is easy; it *can* be put into words. But the production, the cinematic style; *that* is difficult. And *Logan's Run* is beautifully produced.

On looking back through the novel itself right now, it should be mentioned that the screenplay departs from it quite radically. And on a more specific level, there are a great many minor background concepts that simply cannot be brought out in a film (as I keep pointing out *ad nauseum,* one of the problems with science fiction and film is that so many sophisticated s/f concepts need words, words, words).

Now those little background concepts are what a good s/f writer uses to produce a sense of reality. And lack of them is what makes most science fiction films seem so childish. But that can be compensated for by expert use of the other elements of film, the visual ele-

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ments such as sets, costumes, effects, etc., i.e. the production values. This almost never happens either, because the people responsible for them usually have even less conceptual imagination than the writers.

This is not the case with *Logan's Run.* The sets (mostly extant buildings in Texas) are wonderfully used. The costumes are a bit uniform, but their brilliant colors gathered *en masse* in the great square of the City or in the amphitheatre have a real C. L. Moore glamor. The camerawork is excellent — it's good to see a film that isn't grainy or fuzzy. And the effects are very nice indeed: the great domes that house the City, the City itself (which is the neatest job of that sort since *Things to Come*) the ritualistic lottery called the Carousel which is practically indescribable.

Even the overgrown Washington bit works because it's so well done — you don't just see one statue half buried in sand or a dusty plaque that says New York is a Summer Festival (and we all know which movies I'm referring to); you see the whole damn thing, both from a distance and close up. In fact, the one visual I can't quite forgive is that blobby red sun.

Even the actors seemed more than usually competent for a science fiction film. Michael York as Logan is a refreshing change from today's usual subhuman movie "hero"; he seems actually civilized. Jenny Agutter as Jessica comes across as spunkier and brighter than the usual helpless-but-necessary female. And Peter Ustinov as the Old Man who has forgotten his name does a superlative job, with his sly little twitches and mutters and incomprehensions. His character lays the groundwork for a final scene that is probably intellectually hokum, but which works so well dramatically and visually that I can't fault it.

All in all, I really enjoyed this movie. And that, as you poor long-suffering readers know, is so rare that all I can say further is

See *Logan's Run.*

Literary department . . . The Monarch Film Studies series has added two titles to its list: *Science Fiction Films* (Edited by Thomas R. Atkins) and *Horror Films* (by R. H. W. Dillard; both $2.95). The s/f volume is a collection of articles, like all such varying in quality. And I think that its range is a bit limited. The horror volume is more unified; Dillard has chosen to write about a representative film from each decade since sound was introduced. His choice of *The Satyricon* as the epitomal horror film of the '60s mystifies me a bit, however.

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In which Mr. de Camp brings his sure and witty touch to a tale of historical fantasy, specifically magical doings at the coronation of King Valdhelm III.

The Coronet

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

When King Valdhelm II of Locania died, his heir, King Valdhelm III, bade all his vassals to his coronation in the royal city of Kromnitch. This was also the county seat of the king's vassal, Count Petz of Treveria. One of Petz's vassals was Baron Emmerhard of Zurgau, one of whose vassals was Sir Dambert Eudoricson of Arduen.

Sir Dambert and his family met to discuss their plans before dinner. Sir Dambertson's eldest son, Eudoric Dambertson, Esquire, came late and dirty.

"Eudoric!" cried the Lady Aniset. "'Tis the third time of late that thou hast tracked mud into the castle. What's got into thee?"

"Mother!" said Eudoric. "If you'd had my troubles today —"

"Thy carriage-wagon?" asked Sir Dambert.

"Aye. The thing overset on a turn and spilt me into the mud. Lucky I wasn't slain, and the vehicle has suffered scathes, which will take a fortnight to repair. I fear me the fabrication of such a device is beyond our local wainwrights. I had better thought on that ere I entered this compact with Baron Emmerhard."

"Doth it mean," asked Endoric's middle brother Olf, "that your coach be too high and narrow?"

"Aye, but there's no easy remedy. If I make the tread wider, the cursed thing can't pass the narrow straits on the Zurgau-Kromnitch road, for which traffic the wain's especially designed. If I make the wheels smaller, they'll give the passengers a fine bouncing."

Eudoric's sister said, "Why go ye not back to Pathenia, where this art is better understood, and buy a

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carriage-wain already made?"

"'Tis an arduous two-months' journey, and the road over the Asciburgis is a mere track, impassable to wheeled traffic."

"Then," said Eudoric's younger brother Sidmund, "why not hire a brace of Pathenian wainwrights to come hither and work for us?"

"They would not depart their own land unless compelled by force."

"Then compel them!" snorted Sir Dambert. "By the Divine Pair, are we of gentle blood or are we not? Where's thy knightly mettle?"

Eudoric smiled. "You know not the Pathenians' persnickety ideas of the rights of their citizens, Father. 'Twould but get me mewed up in prison, with none to go bail for me."

"The Emperor hath an one," said Sir Dambert. "It, too, must needs have been made by local wainwrights. Were not one of them —"

"Aye, I've seen it," said Eudoric. "'Tis but a farm wagon with a fancy gilded body atop it. Gives the passengers a fearful shaking and can't turn sharp corners. My carriage, contrariwise, suspends the body from leather straps and can turn in its own length. I marked these virtues of the Pathenian coach when I rode in it, when Jillo and I were on our way to jail in Velitchovo for slaying one of their dragons out of season."

Jillo Godmarson was Sir Dambert's horse trainer. Eudoric had made Jillo his assistant in his stagecoach enterprise, the first of its kind in the Empire.

Sir Dambert sighed. "A strange, fantastical land this Pathenia, where dragons have the law's protection and villeins assert their rights against their betters. But let's to this question of the coronation. Wilt thou come, Eudoric? 'Twould pleasure me to have thee by me, but the choice is thine."

"Your pardon, Father," replied Eudoric, "but methinks I'll tarry here. Not yet being knighted, I'm not included in the royal command. Someone should remain to keep an eye on our demesne, lest that caitiff Rainmar raid us. I must, moreover, needs ride my wainwrights with a sharp spur, lest Baron Emmerhard seize the pretext to flout our compact."

"Doth he cool toward thee, then?" asked Dambert.

"Aye. 'Twas all firmly fixed: he to pay for the building of the coach and, upon its completion, to knight me and give me Gerzilda in marriage, in requital of a partnership in my coach line. Now he holds back the money and sidles around his promises like a crab on the beach. Meanwhile, my wainwrights grow loud in demands for arrears in their pay —"

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"Part of thy trouble," said Dambert, "lies at the door of Emmerhard's lord. Petz of Treveria is a man of antique fancies, who likes not the grant of golden spurs for aught but deeds of dought upon the battlefield. Quotha, there's been too much purchase of honors and titles by baseborn tradesmen—"

"My spurs will be for the dragonslaying, not the carriage-building."

"But, son, thy dragonslaying was done, not in the Empire before witnesses, but in a distant, heathen land. So Petz and Emmerhard have nought but thy word —"

"What ails my word?" began Eudoric angrily.

"Oh, I believe thee; we all do. But these others know thee not as we do."

In an inn of Kromnitch, Baron Emmerhard of Zurgau admired his scarlet-and-ermine reflection in the long glass. He ran a comb through his graying beard, patted the resulting snowstorm of dandruff from his robe, and said to his wife, "Not bad for a man of my age, my dear. Now, prithee, the coronet!"

The Baroness Trudwig turned to Emmerhard's body servant. "My lord's coronet, Sigric! 'Tis in the trunk with the red stripes."

"Forgive me your ladyship," said the valet, "but 'tis not there."

"How now?" said Emmerhard. "Let me see... thou art right, valet! Then where is the accursed bauble?"

"I know not, my lord," said Sigric. "Mona and Albrecta and I have already searched the twenty-three trunks and valises. I know not how to tell you, sir, but I fear me it hath been left behind in Castle Zurgau —"

"*What?*" roared Emmerhard, hopping and stamping. "Thou dolt! Ass! Noodlehead!" He aimed a punch at Sigric. He was careful, however, even in his rage, to move slowly enough to give Sigric time to duck. Good valets were not easily come by.

A half hour later, the contents of the twenty-three traveling chests of Baron Emmerhard and his family were spread around their suite, but there was no sign of Emmerhard's coronet. The Baron sat in a chair with his face in his hands, while his wife and four daughters tried to comfort him.

"Nay, nay," he groaned. "By the God and Goddess, I cannot take my place in line without my regalia. 'Twere a slight to the new king. I should never live it down. I'll send a message to young Valdhelm, that I'm taken with a sudden tisick and like to die o't."

"Could not a hard-riding courier gallop back to Zurgau to fetch the thing hither in time?"

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asked the Lady Trudwig.

"Nay, with the fleetest steeds in relays, he could not return ere the morrow, and the coronation's at high noon."

Gerzilda, the tall, willowy, blonde eldest daughter, spoke up: "Father! Don't ye call to mind that my lord Petz is abed with the gout? He hath been excused from the ceremony."

"Well?"

"Why can ye not borrow Treveria's coronet?"

"Nay, 'tis a count's coronet. It hath more spikes and knobs than that of a mere baron."

"None would notice. If they do, ye can explain the circumstances and pass it off with a jest. And I shall die if I cannot attend in my new gown —"

Baron Emmerhard grumbled some more, but at length his womenfolk brought him around.

"Well," he said at last, "let's forth, stopping at Count Petz's on the way. Since his town house be on t'other side of the city, this divigation will force us to miss the burning of the heretics; but that can't be helped."

As a result of the gathering of nobility, the narrow, winding streets of Kromnitch were more crowded than usual. A fine drizzle fell. The chairs bearing Baron Emmerhard and his family were stopped a score of times, and the chairmen carrying them slipped and staggered over the muddy cobbles. It took the party over an hour to reach Count Petz's mansion.

Knowing his lord's vassals by sight, the doorkeeper quickly let in the Zurgau family. He told Emmerhard:

"My lord is with his physician, sir; but I'll send a message."

"A pox!" said Emmerhard. "This brooks no delay. Petz knows me well enough. Stay here, ladies; I'll go up myself."

"But, my lord —" began the doorkeeper.

"My good man, take thy etiquette and stuff it. I'm in a hurry. Show me to Petz's chambers, or get me someone who will."

In Count Petz's bedchamber, the huge old count of Treveria lay sprawled on his bed. A gray-bearded, bespectacled little man pottered around a tripod, on which a mixture of burning powders sent up colored smokes. The little man was incanting: *"Abrasaxa, Shenuoth* —" when Baron Emmerhard, preceded by a frightened servant, burst in.

"Petzi!" cried Emmerhard. "Pardon the intrusion, but I must have your help instanter!"

"Oh, Emmeri!" growled Petz, heaving his great bulk up and rearranging his vast white beard

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atop the covers. "Why in the name of the Divine Pair didst thou interrupt Calporio's spell against my gout? Now he must needs start over."

"A grievous thing indeed, my lords," clucked the little man. "'Tis the second such interruption. I might as well go back to bleeding."

"Which will doubtless finish off my liege lord altogether," said Emmerhard. "Doctor Baldonius tells me that bleeding's a useless, discredited —"

"Baldonius!" snorted Doctor Calporio. "I will not try your lordship's patience by my opinion of his servants, but if that mountebank—"

"Hold thy tongue, sirrah; we've not time for disceptation. Petzi, my trouble is this..." Emmerhard rattled off the tale of the forgotten coronet.

"Certes, thou shalt have mine," said Petz. He spoke to the servant who had ushered Emmerhard in. "Harmund! Give the baron my coronet to wear at the coronation. Yarely, he hath but little time."

"A thousand thanks, Petzi!" roared Emmerhard as he turned to follow Harmund out. "Let me know if I can do aught for you."

Harmund led Emmerhard to Count Petz's strong room. After comings and goings with keys — for the door could only be opened by turning two keys in the lock at once — they entered the room. When a massive chest was unlocked and opened, there lay two count's coronets, each in its padded, satin-lined box. Harmund hesitated. "My Lord said not which to give you, sir. Shall I go back to ask —"

"Nay, no time, and 'twould upset his little wizard to be interrupted thrice at his spell. The one on the left looks the older; let's try it. I would fain not expose my old friend's best headpiece to the risk of being dropped or dented."

The older coronet proved a size too large. "Murrain!" said Emmerhard. "This thing rides atop my ears."

"I'll fix it, my lord," said Harmund. A strip of parchment stuck with flour paste to the inside of the lining made the coronet fit passably well. Baron Emmerhard rushed off to rejoin his women.

As Emmerhard had anticipated, they were too late to see the burning of the heretics, three unrepentant monotheists from Pathenia. They reached the Great Temple of the Divine Pair just in time to take their places for the coronation. Emmerhard, trying to hurry and to move at the same time in a stately, dignified manner, was the last man to reach the baron's rank. From several places down the knights'

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rank, behind the barons, Emmerhard's vassal Sir Dambert greeted him with a small, discreet wave.

While Emmerhard was lining up with the other barons of the Empire, Doctor Calporio was looking into the chest in Count Petz's strong room, werein lay the remaining coronet. "Harmund!" shrieked Calporio.

"Aye, Doctor?"

"Why gavest thou the baron the old coronet?"

"He chose it himself, sir; none forbade —"

"Didst thou not know I'd been using that bauble for a mighty magical work? That it be charged with the most puissant sorcerous powers? Ah, demons of the Pit, with what ninnyhammers am I surrounded!"

Calporio dashed out with his purple robe flapping. Back in Count Petz's bedchamber, he told his employer of this development.

"Carry not on so, good Doctor," said the count. "From what thou dost tell me, the wearer must needs do certain things and make a wish, ere the demon prisoned in the gem will act. Isn't not so?"

"Aye, but —"

"Since Emmerhard knows not the formula, he cannot activate the coronet. So let us calmly await his return of the object."

Calporio did not look convinced.

Baron Emmerhard stood in the Great Temple, in a row with the other barons, while the ceremony ground on. It had already lasted two hours and was due to continue for two hours more of hymns, sermons, speeches, and ritual acts. Valdhelm III, resplendent in blue and gold, had just made his appearance in front of the altar.

The new king was a nondescript young man, pleasant enough but not, it would seem, very bright. Rumor had it that at times he thought he was a watering pot. The effective rule of the kingdom would doubtless be in the hands of a cabal of ruthless, power-hungry magnates like the Duke of Tencteria, who had been acting as advisers to the crown prince. Emmerhard looked to the future with gloom.

For the present, his feelings were of suffocating boredom. Even the most glittering tableau loses its glamor with time. For Baron Emmerhard, the coronation had long since passed that point. He was evidently not the only one. Out of the corner of his eye, he had seen Baron Randver of Sidinia sneak a quick gulp of water-of-life from a flask concealed in the sleeve of his coronation robe.

Furthermore, the baron's feet hurt. The Emperor and his family sat in the front pew, and behind them sat several kings of the Empire. Everyone else, however,

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had to stand. The parchment strip inside the coronet began to cut painfully into Baron Emmerhard's forehead.

King Valdhelm was making a long series of responses to questions addressed to him by the Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Universal Dualistic Church. Baron Emmerhard's nose began to itch.

All eyes were fixed upon the king. Some (Emmerhard thought) feared and some hoped that the young simpleton would get his responses mixed up. This would cast doubt upon the validity of the ceremony or at least cause embarrassment and get the reign off to an unlucky start.

Making sure that no one was watching him, Baron Emmerhard gave his nose a furtive scratch. At the same time he subvocalized: "I wish I were home!"

And *floomp!* he found himself alone in a forest.

The baron's first impulse was to flee shouting in mad terror, but he mastered himself. After all, he was a mature man, of more than average intelligence, who had survived riots, battles, and attempts at assassination.

He thought. Nothing but greenery could be seen in any direction. Judging by the fresh springtime foliage, he might well be somewhere in his own barony of Zurgau, although he could not say just where. Much of the barony was forested.

In his youth, Emmerhard had known the woods of the county of Treveria well from hunting in them. During the last decade, however, he had hardly hunted at all. An injury had discouraged this activity, and then he had become too involved in the economic side of his barony to resume it. Now he had forgotten most of the topographic details.

Still, if he walked downhill, he would finally come to a stream. The stream would lead him to the River Lupa or at least past some landmark that would guide him to settled country.

He thought of climbing a tree to get his bearings but decided against it. It would ruin his coronation clothes. Besides, the pale-green leaves were too thick to enable him to see far, even from aloft.

He was plainly the victim of magic. Some spell had whisked him from the coronation to this distant spot. He wondered how many had noticed his disappearance and whether some foe had done this to shame him. If magic had brought him hither, magic was needed to take him back.

Before setting out on a hike, for which his coronation costume was ludicrously unsuited, Emmerhard raised his voice in a bellow:

"Hola! Hola, there! Help!"

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On the third attempt, he heard a faint reply: "Who calls?"

"Help! Help!" repeated Emmerhard.

"I come," said the voice.

Emmerhard heard the sound of hooves, muffled by turf. Soon a horse came in sight, the rider swaying and ducking as he dodged branches.

"Eudoric!" cried Emmerhard. For the rider was indeed his prospective son-in-law: stocky of build, dark of hair, and square of jaw. Eudoric, who cared little for appearances, wore rough forester's garb, stained and soiled.

"By the guardians of Hell!" cried the baron. "How camest thou here so timely?"

"I've been visiting with your pet enchanter, the learned Doctor Baldonius," said Eudoric. "By the Divine Pair, my lord, what do you here in your court regalia? A horse on a housetop were no more incongruous."

"I know, I know." Emmerhard briefly told of being snatched from the coronation. "Saidst thou we're nigh unto Baldonius' house? Lead me thither, forthwith! Magic brought me hither, and magic shall take me back. Hasten, Eudoric, so that I shall return ere the coronation be over and my want be marked!"

Eudoric looked at the baron with narrowed eyes. "A moment, my lord. Meseems there be a question or two to be settled first."

"How meanst thou, sirrah?"

"Well, imprimis, there's my oft-promised knighthood. You know about my dragonslaying in Pathenia, not to mention serving a month in their stinking jail, for breach of their game laws. So, now, where's the title?"

"Meanest thou, dog, that thou wouldst abandon me in this trackless wildwood, and I comply not with thy demands?"

Eudoric grinned. "You grasp the import, my lord, albeit I should have framed it more tactfully. Secondus, you've promised me Gerzilda's hand, and when I've pressed you of late, you've put me off, as if you were minded to back out of the bargain."

"The final word shall be the lass's in any case. I'm no petty tyrant, to give my chicks to husbands against their will."

Eudoric waved a hand. "That aspect frets me not. And lastly, there's the money I owe the wainwrights, which you've promised me and then withheld —"

"Thy damned coach-wagon has been building for months, with no end in sight. Am I to pour my silver down a bottomless well?"

The argument continued for another quarter-hour, while Baron Emmerhard grew even more agitated. At last he burst out?

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"Oh, very well, thou scoundrel! I'll yield to thy extortionate demands because I must. Now show me the way to Baldonius' house!"

"Not that I mistrust your word," drawled Eudoric, "but I shall be better able to guide you when your undertakings are written down."

"Impudent knave!" shouted the baron, dancing about with clenched fists. "Anyway, what shall we write on?"

Eudoric brought out of his scrip several sheets of parchment. "Here, by good hap, are the latest drawings of plans for our carriage. The backs will do nicely."

"Hast pen and ink, too, thou young devil?"

"Certes. A gentleman tradesman like me must be prepared. Now, first we'll write out my patent of knighthood. Can you write, my lord?"

"A little, enough to sign my name. I read not badly."

Another quarter-hour passed while Eudoric scribbled three documents binding Baron Emmerhard to fulfill his promises. The documents signed, Eudoric hoisted Emmerhard upon the rump of his horse and clucked the beast to a trot.

Doctor Baldonius weighed the coronet, peered at it through a lens, and listened to it through an instrument. He shook his head.

"'Tis typical of Calporio's incompetency," he said. "The demon was entrapped in the great emerald for but a single usage. When my lord scratched his nose and murmured a wish to be home, the demon whisked him hither and then fled back to its own plane. Now the coronet's no more magical than any other."

"Why didn't he deposit me at Castle Zurgau instead of in the woods?" asked Emmerhard.

"This spell had been tailored to the needs of Count Petz. All the demon knew of you was that ye were lord of Zurgau; so he dropped you at random in the barony. Or else it was the simple inaccuracy one expects of a pilot model. 'Twas a stroke of luck that ye encountered Sir Eudoric."

"Luck, say ye? Humph!"

Doctor Baldonius smiled through his long gray beard. "I said not what kind of luck, my lord."

Eudoric felt his sore shoulder and grinned wryly. "My father - in - law - to - be has had his revenge. He whacked me hard enough to break my collar bone when he dubbed me."

"No more than thou meritest, whelp," growled Emmerhard. "But, Doctor, how about getting me back to Kromnitch ere the damned ceremony be over?"

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"There is a spell, but 'twill cost you a thousand marks —"

"Hoy! Art mad?"

"Nay, my lord, this cantrip calls for my rarest ingredients and leaves me fordone for a sennight. Time presses; shall we begin?"

A puff of displaced air announced the return of Baron Emmerhard to the Great Temple of Kromnitch, just as the Supreme Pontiff lowered the royal crown, its gems winking many colors in the lamplight, on the head of the kneeling Valdhelm. Since all eyes were fixed on the new king, the only one to notice Emmerhard's materializaion was the man directly behind him, in the front rank of the knights.

This was Sir Fredlin Yorgenson of Aviona, far to the north of the Empire. Sir Fredlin blinked and stared at the baron's back. He thought he must have dropped off to sleep standing up and awakened an instant later, after Emmerhard had moved into place in front of him. In any case, Sir Fredlin did not intend to cast doubt on his own sanity by telling of this phenomenon.

Baron Emmerhard sat in his suite at the inn, fuming. "A pox on that young extortioner!" he roared to his wife and daughters. "I should have snatched the damned parchments out of his hands and destroyed them. But, by the time I bethought me of that, Baldonius had already witnessed them, and Eudoric had returned them to his scrip. 'Twould have been a tussle. He's a well-thewed youth, and I'm not so young as whilom."

"Why not see our advocate, the learned Doctor Rupman?" said Gerzilda. "Surely he could find a way out of these legal gyves that Dambert's son has tricked you into."

"Nay, nay, puss," said Emmerhard. "Rupman's legal fees would be more than the money I owe Eudoric under that bond. And, forsooth, when I look at the matter with the eye of reason, that's the only one of the three instruments that truly hurts. 'Tis nought to me if Eudoric strut about with 'sir' before his name. And whether he wed thee or not is, in fine, a matter for thy choice."

"If Eudoric's coach works, we may get our coin back," said Baroness Trudwig.

"A big if, my dear. I've lost faith in the scheme, what of the long delays. Nor am I convinced that such a partnership is meet for a nobleman, despite Eudoric's argument that anything to do with horses is gentlemanly. Still, 'tis not impossible."

"What said Count Petz when thou didst return his coronet?"

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"He thought it a great joke, albeit that little grasshopper of a wizard, Calporio, was vexed at the expenditure of his costly enchantment on such a sleeveless errand. But Petzi, between roars of laughter, assured him he was thankful that the spell had first been tested on his faithful vassal — meaning me — 'stead of on's fat and gouty self. A murrain on all magical mummeries!"

Feeling very noble in his gilded spurs, Sir Eudoric handed the reins to Jillo and swung down from the driver's seat of his new coach in the courtyard of Castle Zurgau. Baron Emmerhard sourly regarded the gleaming paint.

"Well, my lord?" said Eudoric.

Emmerhard jerked a thumb. "Thou shalt find her in the flower garden."

Eudoric left the coach in charge of Jillo. In the flower garden, he came upon Gerzilda. "Darling!" he cried, spreading his arms.

"Darling me no darlings, sirrah!" she said, backing away.

"Why, what's the matter? Are you not my betrothed?"

"Nay, nor never shall be. Think you I'd wed a man who so entreated my poor father?"

"But, Gerzilda, it was the only way I could —"

"Talk all you please, but 'twill make no difference. Go, your presence is hateful to me."

Eudoric went. In the courtyard, he and Baron Emmerhard exchanged looks. Eudoric said:

"Knew you what she'd say?"

"Aye. Blame me not; 'twas her idea entirely."

Eudoric thought. "Would your second daughter, Zena, care to receive my addresses?"

"Not likely. If I may offer advice, *Sir* Eudoric, meseems a young fellow like thee, who cares little for distinctions of rank and hath the outlook of a tradesman, were happier with some tradesman's daughter.

"Oh? I'll think on't." Eudoric's melancholy visage brightened. He swung into the driver's seat, took the reins from Jillo, and waved cheerfully to Baron Emmerhard. He guided the vehicle out the castle gates and towards the town of Zurgau to pick up his first passengers from Kromnitch.

After all, he thought, Gerzilda was taller than he. And, while there were plenty of girls in the world, there was nothing like a good, trusty source of steady income.

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THE COMET THAT WASN'T

I have just received a phone call from a young woman who asked to speak to me about one of my books.

"Certainly," I said, and then, with sudden alarm at her tone, I asked, "Are you weeping?"

"Yes, I am," she said. "It's not really your fault, I suppose, but your book made me feel so sad."

I was astonished. My stories, while excellent, are chiefly noted for their cerebral atmosphere and tone, and are not usually considered remarkable for their emotional content. Still, one or two of my stories might pluck at the heartstrings, * and there's something a little flattering about having your writing reduce someone to tears.

"Which book are you referring to, Miss?" I asked.

"Your book about the Universe," she said.

If I had been astonished before that was nothing compared to my confusion now. *The Universe* is a perfectly respectable volume, written in a logical and sprightly manner, and doesn't possess one word calculated to elicit tears. Or so I thought.

I said, "How could that book make you feel sad?"

**"The Ugly Little Boy," for instance which you can find in my book, NINE TOMORROWS.*

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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"I was reading about the development of the Universe and about how it must come to an end. It just made me feel there was no *use* to anything. I just didn't want to live."

I said, "But young woman, didn't you notice that I said our Sun had at least eight billion years to live and that the Universe might last hundreds of billions of years?"

"But that's not forever," she said, "Doesn't it make *you* despair? Doesn't it make astronomers just not want to live?"

"No, it doesn't," I said, earnestly, "And you mustn't feel that way, either. Each of us has to die in much less than billions of years, and we come to terms with that, don't we?"

"That's not the same thing. When we die, others will follow us, but when the Universe dies there's nothing left."

Desperate to cheer her, I said, "Well, look, it may be that the Universe oscillates and that new universes are born when old ones die. It may even be that human beings may learn how to survive the death of a Universe in time to come."

The sobbing seemed to have diminished by the time I dared let her hang up.

For a while, I just sat there staring at the telephone. I am myself a notoriously soft-hearted person and cry at movie listings, but I must admit it would never occur to me to cry over the end of the Universe billions of years hence. In fact, I wrote about the end of the Universe in my story, "The Last Question" * and was very upbeat about it.

Yet as I sat there I felt myself beginning to think that astronomy might be a dangerous subject and one from which sensitive young women ought to be shielded. Surely, I thought, I can't let myself fall into *that* trap, and so the only thing I can do now is to sit down immediately at my typewriter and determinedly begin an astronomical essay.

Let's begin with the number seven, a notoriously lucky number. It is used in all sorts of connotations that make it seem like the natural number for important groups. There are the seven virtues, the seven deadly sins, the seven wonders of the world, and so on, and so on.

What makes seven so wonderful?

You could decide that it is due to some numerical property. Perhaps we might feel that there was something wonderful about its being the sum

It is also in NINE TOMORROWS.

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of the first odd number and the first square, or that there is something about the fact that it is the largest prime under ten that is significant.

I don't think so. I suspect that seven was lucky long before people grew sophisticated enough to become mystical about numbers.

My own feeling is that we have to go back in time to a point where there were seven objects that were clearly exactly seven, clearly important, and even clearly awe-inspiring. The impressive nature of those objects would then cast an aura of holiness or good fortune on the number itself.

Can there be any question that the objects I'm referring to must be the traditional seven planets of ancient times, the objects which we now call Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn?

It was the ancient Sumerians some time in the 3rd Millennium, B.C., who made the first systematic observations of these seven bodies and observed the manner in which each changed position from night to night relative to the fixed stars.*

The changing patterns of the planets against the constellations through which they passed in their more or less complicated movements† were gradually assumed to have significance with respect to Earthly affairs. Their influence in this respect was more than human power could account for and they were naturally considered gods. The Sumerians named the planets for various gods in their pantheon, and this habit has never been broken in Western history. The names were changed, but only to other gods, and at this very time, *we* call the planets by the names of Roman Gods.

It was from the seven planets that the custom of the seven-day period we call the week arose in Sumeria, with each day presided over by a different one of the planets, and that is reflected in the names of those days.‡

The Jews picked up the notion of the week during the Babylonian Captivity but devised a creation story that accounted for the seven days without reference to the seven planets — since planet-gods were not permitted in the strict monotheism of post-Exilic Judaism.

But if seven lost the holiness of the planets in Judeo-Christian ethic, it gained the holiness of the Sabbath. And the aura of inviolability seems to

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**It is this position change that gave rise to the word "planet," which is from the Greek for "wandering."*

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†*See THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES, August 1970.*

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‡*See MOON OVER BABYLON, April 1972.*

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have persisted about the seven planets. It was somehow unthinkable that there should be eight, for instance, and that feeling persisted through the first two centuries of modern science.

After Copernicus presented his heliocentric theory in 1543, the term planet came to be used for those bodies that moved about the Sun. Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were still planets under the new dispensation, but the Sun itself was not, of course. Nor was the Moon, which came to be called a satellite, a name given to those bodies that circled primarily about a planet, as the Moon circled about the Earth. To counterbalance the loss of the Sun and Moon, the Earth itself came to be considered a planet in the Copernican theory.

Still, that was just nomenclature. Whatever you called the various wandering bodies in the sky, there were exactly seven of them, and we can refer to them as the "seven traditional planets."

In 1609, Galileo turned the telescope on the sky and discovered that there were myriads of fixed stars that were too faint to be seen by the unaided eye, but which existed just the same. Despite this, no one seems to have suggested that, in analogy, new planets might also be discovered. The inviolability of the traditional, and sacred, number seven seemed firm.

To be sure, there were also bodies, unseen by the unaided eye, in the Solar system itself; for, in 1610, Galileo discovered four smaller bodies circling Jupiter, satellites to that planet as Moon is satellite to Earth. Then, before the century was over, five satellites of Saturn were discovered, making a total of ten that were known, when our own Moon is included.

Nevertheless, even that didn't alter the sacred number of seven. By defiant illogic, our Moon retained its separate place, while the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn were lumped with the planets they circle. We can do this by saying that there are seven *visible* wandering bodies in the sky, visible to the unaided eye, that is.

There were the comets, of course, which wandered among the stars, too, but their appearance was so atypical and their comings and goings so unpredictable that they didn't count. Aristotle felt that they were atmospheric exhalations and part of the Earth rather than of the sky. Others suspected they were special creations, sent across the sky as one-shots, so to speak, in order to foretell catastrophe.

Even in 1758, when Edmund Halley's prediction that the comet of 1682 (now called "Halley's Comet" in his honor) would return in that year was verified, and it was understood that comets moved in fixed orbits

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about the Sun, they were *still* not included among the planets. The appearance remained too atypical, and the cigar-shaped orbits too elongated for them to be allowed on the sacred precincts.

And yet the odd thing is that there *is* an additional wanderer that fulfills all the criteria of the traditional seven. It is visible to the unaided eye, and it moves relative to the fixed stars. It cannot be denied the right to be considered an additional planet, so just for a while let us call it "Additional."

Why was Additional never observed for all the centuries down to the 18th? To answer that, let's ask why the seven traditional planets *were* observed.

For one thing, they are bright. The Sun is the brightest object in the sky by far, and the Moon, though a very poor second, is second. Even the remaining five traditional planets, which are star-like points far dimmer than the Sun and the Moon, are nevertheless brighter than almost anything else in the sky. In Table 1, the magnitude* of the seven planets is

Table 1

Object	Magnitude at Brightest	Brightness (Sirius = 1)
Sun	-26.9	15,000,000
Moon	-12.6	30,000
Venus	- 4.3	14
Mars	- 2.8	3.5
Jupiter	- 2.5	2.5
Sirius	- 1.4	1.0
Mercury	- 1.2	0.9
Canopus	- 0.7	0.5
Saturn	- 0.4	0.4
Additional	+ 5.7	0.0015

given, along with that of Sirius and Canopus, the two brightest of the fixed stars — and Additional.

As you see, the five brightest of the traditional planets are also the five brightest objects in the sky. Even the two dimmest of the traditional planets are not far behind Sirius and Canopus. So it is clear that the seven traditional planets attract the eye, and anyone observing the sky in primitive times would see them even if he saw very little else.

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*See *QUASAR, QUASAR, BURNING BRIGHT* [*October, 1976*].

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Additional, on the other hand, is only 1/700 as bright as Sirius, and only 1/270 as bright as Saturn. While it is visible to the unaided eye, it is just *barely* visible.

Of course, brightness isn't the only criterion. Sirius and Canopus are of planetary brightness, but no one ever mistook them for planets. A planet must shift its position among the fixed stars, and the faster it shifts, the more readily it is noticed.

The Moon, for instance, which shifts most rapidly, does so by an average of 48,100 seconds of arc per day, a distance which is nearly 26 times its own width. If one were to watch the Moon for a single hour under Sumerian conditions (clear nights and no city lights) that would be enough to show the shift unmistakably.

The other planets move more slowly, and in Table 2, the average shift per day is given for each of the traditional planets, with Additional included.

Table 2

Planet	Average Shift (seconds of arc per day)	Days to Move the Width of the Moon
Moon	48,100	0.038
Mercury	14,900	0.125
Venus	5,840	0.319
Sun	3,550	0.525
Mars	1,910	0.976
Jupiter	302	6.17
Saturn	122	15.3
Additional	42.9	43.5

Of the seven traditional planets, you see that Jupiter and Saturn are the slow-shifting ones, with Saturn by far the slower of the two. It takes Saturn 29.5 years to accumulate shift enough to circle the entire sky. For that reason, Saturn may have been the last planet to have been recognized in the old days, since it was both the least bright and the least fast. (Mercury which competes for that honor, is in some ways the hardest to see since it is always near the Sun, but once it is glimpsed at Sunset or at dawn, its extraordinarily rapid motion may give it away at once.)

But what about Additional, which is only 1/270 as bright as Saturn and which shifts at only a little over 1/3 its speed? That combination of dimness and slowness is fatal. No observer in ancient times and very few

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even in early telescopic times were likely to look at that object from night to night. There was nothing that made it seem more remarkable than any of the remaining two or three thousand stars of its brightness. Even if astronomers did actually look at it for a few nights in a row, its slow motion was not likely to make itself overwhelmingly obvious.

So Additional went unnoticed — at least as a planet. Anyone with reasonable eyesight who looked in its direction would see it as a "star," of course, and anyone with a telescope certainly would.

In fact, an occasional astronomer, plotting the position of the various stars in the sky, might see Additional, plot it as a star, and even give it a name. In 1690, the English astronomer, John Flamsteed, noted it in the constellation Taurus, recorded it, and called it "34 Tauri."

Afterward, some other astronomer might see Additional in a different place, plot its new position and might even give it a different name. There would be no reason to identify the new star with the old star. In fact, the same astronomer might record it in slightly different positions on different nights — each time as a different star. The French astronomer Pierre Charles Lemonnier apparently recorded the position of Additional thirteen different times in thirteen different places in the middle 1700s, under the impression that he was recording thirteen different stars.

How was this possible? Two reasons.

The other planets were, first of all, clearly planets, even if one disregarded their motion and their brightness. Planets were not points of light as the stars were; they were round discs. The Sun and Moon appear as discs to the unaided eye, while Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn all appeared as discs even to the primitive telescopes of the 17th and 18th Centuries. Additional, however, did not show up as a disc in the telescopes of men like Flamsteed and Lemonnier, and in the absence of a disc, why should they think in terms of planets?

And the second reason is that the sevenness of the traditional planets was so well entrenched in the common thinking of man, that Additional as a planet was unthinkable, and so astronomers didn't think of it. You might as well suddenly decide you had discovered an eighth day of the week.

But then upon the scene came Friedrich Wilhelm Herschel, born in Hannover on November 15, 1738. Hannover was a then-independent nation in what is now western Germany, and for historical reasons its ruler happened also to be King George II of Great Britain.

Herschel's father was a musician in the Hannoverian army, and Herschel himself entered the same profession. In 1756, however, the Seven

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Years' War began (an odd coincidence that the number seven should figure crucially in Herschel's life in so completely non-planetary a way), and the French, fighting Prussia and Great Britain, occupied the Hannoverian realm of the British monarch.

The young Herschel, unwilling to suffer the miseries of an enemy occupation, managed to wriggle out of Hannover, deserting the army in the process, and got to Great Britain, where he remained the rest of his life and where he Anglicized his name to a simple William.

He continued his musical career, and by 1766 he was a well-known organist and music teacher at the resort city of Bath, tutoring up to thirty-five pupils a week.

Prosperity gave him a chance to gratify his fervent desire for learning. He taught himself Latin and Italian. The theory of musical sounds led him to mathematics, and that, in turn, led him to optics. He read a book that dealt with Newton's discoveries in optics, and he became filled with a fervent and life-long desire to observe the heavens.

But for that he needed a telescope. He couldn't afford to buy one, and when he tried renting one, it turned out that its quality was poor and he was very disappointed at what he saw — or, rather, didn't see.

He came to the decision at last that there was nothing to do but to attempt to make his own telescopes and, in particular, to grind his own lenses and mirrors. He ground two hundred pieces of glass and metal without making anything that satisfied him.

Then, in 1772, he went back to Hannover to get his sister, Caroline, who, for the rest of her life, assisted first William, then his son, John, in their astronomic labors with a single-minded intensity that precluded marriage or virtually any life for herself at all.*

With Caroline's help, Herschel had better luck. While he ground for hours at a time, Caroline would read to him and feed him. Eventually, he got the trick of grinding and developed telescopes good enough to satisfy him. In fact, the musician who could not afford to buy a telescope ended by making for himself the best telescopes then in existence.

His first satisfactory telescope, completed in 1774, was a 6-inch reflector, and with it he could see the Great Nebula in Orion and clearly make out the rings of Saturn. That was not bad for an amateur.

Much more was ahead, however. He began to use his telescope systematically, passing it from one object in the sky to another. He

**She did make astronomic observations of her own, eventually, with a telescope William made for her. She discovered eight comets, was the first woman astronomer of note, and died, at last, just ten weeks short of her 98th birthday.*

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bombarded learned bodies with papers on the mountains on the Moon, on Sunspots, on variable stars, and on the Martian poles. He was the first to note that Mars's axis was tilted to its plane of revolution at about the same angle as Earth's was, so that the Martian seasons were essentially like Earth's, except that they were twice as long and considerably colder.

Then, on the night of Tuesday, March 13, 1781, Herschel, in his methodical progress across the sky, suddenly found himself looking at Additional.

There was now an important difference. Herschel was looking at Additional with a telescope that was far superior to any of those used by earlier astronomers. Herschel's telescope magnified the object to the point where it appeared as a *disc*. Herschel, in other words, was looking at a disc where no disc was supposed to be.

Did Herschel jump at once to the notion that he had found a planet? Of course not! An additional planet was unthinkable. He accepted the only possible alternative and announced that he had discovered a comet.

But he kept on observing Additional and by March 19 could see that it was shifting position with respect to the fixed stars at a speed only about a third as great as that of Saturn's shift.

That was a troublesome thing. Ever since ancient Greek times, it had been accepted that the more slowly a planet shifted against the stars, the farther it was likely to be from us, and the new telescopic astronomy had confirmed that with the modification that it was distance from the Sun that counted.

Since Additional was shifting much more slowly than Saturn, it had to be more distant from the Sun than Saturn was. Of course, comets moved in orbits that took them far beyond Saturn, but no comet could be seen out there. Comets had to be much closer to the Sun than Saturn was in order to become visible.

What's more, Additional's motion was clearly in such a direction as to indicate the object was making its way through the signs of the zodiac, as all the planets did, but as virtually none of the comets did.

Then, on April 6, 1781, he managed to get a good enough view of Additional to see that the little disc had sharp edges like a planet, not hazy ones, like a comet. What's more, it showed no signs of a tail.

Finally, when he had enough observations to calculate an orbit, he found that orbit to be nearly circular like that of a planet, and not very elongated like that of a comet.

His comet wasn't; it was a planet. What's more, from its slow shift, it lay far beyond Saturn; it was just twice as far from the Sun as Saturn was.

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At one bound, the diameter of the known planetary system was doubled. From 2.85 billion kolometers or 1.77 billion miles (the diameter of Saturn's orbit) it had risen to 5.71 billion kilometers or 3.57 billion miles (the diameter of Additional's orbit). It is Additional's great distance that is responsible for its dimness, its slow shift against the stars, its unusualy small disc, in short, for its very belated recognition as a planet.

Now it was up to Herschel to name the planet. In a bit of excess diplomacy, he named it after the then-sovereign of Great Britain, George III, and called it "Georgium Sidus" ("George's star"), an uncommonly poor name for a planet.

King George was, of course, flattered. He officially pardoned Herschel's youthful desertion from the Hannoverian army and appointed him his private astronomer at a salary of three hundred guineas a year. As the discoverer of a new planet, the first new one in at least five thousand years, he became at one bound the most famous astronomer of the world, a position he retained (and *deserved,* for he made many other important discoveries) to the end of his life. Perhaps most comforting of all, he married a rich widow in 1788, and his financial problems were non-existent thereafter.

Fortunately, for all of Herschel's newfound prestige, the name he gave Additional was not accepted by the indignant intellectuals of Europe. They weren't going to abandon the time-honored practice of naming planets for the classical gods just in order to flatter a British king. When some British astronomers suggested "Herschel" as the name for the planet, that was rejected, too.

It was the German astronomer, Johann Elert Bode, who offered a classical solution. The planets that are farther from the Sun than Earth is, present a sequence of generations. Those planets, in order, are Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. In the Greek mythology Ares (the Roman Mars) was the son of Zeus (the Roman Jupiter) who was the son of Kronos (the Roman Saturn.) For a planet beyond Saturn, it is only necessary to remember that Kronos was the son of Ouranos (the Roman Uranus). Why not, then, call the new planet, Uranus?

The notion was accepted with a glad cry, and Uranus it was and has remained ever since.

Oddly enough, the sacred seven was not really distrubed by the discovery of Uranus. Rather, it was restored! By the Copernican system, in which the Sun and Moon are *not* planets, and Earth *is,* there were just six known planets prior to 1781. These, in order of increasing distance from the Sun were: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Once

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Uranus was added the number of Compernican planets became *seven!*

As Herschel's reputation and wealth grew, he built ever bigger and better telescopes. He returned to his planet, Uranus, in 1787, and found two satellites circling it, the eleventh and twelfth known to exist (counting our Moon.* These satellites were eventually named Titania and Oberon, after the queen and king of the fairies in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." It was the first time that classical mythology had been abandoned in naming the satellites.

These satellites introduced an interesting anomaly—

The axis of several of the planets were tipped from the perpendicular to the plane of their orbital revolutions. Thus, Saturn's axis was tipped 27 degrees, Mar's was tipped 24 degrees, and Earth's 23.5 degrees. Jupiter's axis was a little unusual in being tipped only 3 degrees.

The planes of the orbital revolutions of the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn were tipped to the same extent that the axis was. The satellites revolved in the plane of the planetary equator.†

But the satellites of Uranus moved in a plane that was tipped 98 degrees from the perpendicular to the plane of Uranus's orbit. Could it be that Uranus's axis was tipped by that much and was very nearly in the plane of its orbital revolution? If so, Uranus would seem to be lying on its side, so to speak, as it moved around the Sun.

This extreme axial tip was eventually confirmed, and to this day astronomers have no adequate explanation as to why Uranus, alone of all the known planets, should be lying on its side.

And yet this is not the most dramatic thing to have come out of the study of Uranus — but I am out of space and will have to carry on next month.

**In 1789, he discovered two more satellites of Saturn, making seven for that planet, and fourteen altogether.*

†*See THE WRONG TURNING, September 1975.*

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Although Somers III and his German Shepherd detective Ralph are not yet household words, we have learned that a Portland Oregon group has formed a society devoted to the study of the adventures of Ralph von Wau Wau. It's called The Bellener Street Irregulars, and it will issue an irregular publication, The Bellener Street Journal. *This new Somers story is wild.*

The Doge Whose Barque Was Worse Than His Bight

by JONATHAN SWIFT SOMERS III

Editorial Preface

A Scarletin Study, the first of the Ralph von Wau Wau series, appeared in the March, 1975, issue. Those interested in biographical details about the author may refer to Kilgore Trout's *Venus on the Half-Shell* (Dec., 1974, and Jan., 1975 issues; Dell Publications, February, 1975.

Since then, your inquisitive editor has unearthed some information unprovided by Trout. Somers was born in Petersburg, Illinois, on January 26, 1910. His grandfather was a judge; his father, an aspiring but unpublished poet. Their epitaphs and a fragment of Somers III's blank verse epic can be found in Edgar Lee Masters' *The Spoon River Anthology.*

Somers III was partially paralyzed by polio at the age of ten. Though he has never been out of his native town, he often soars from his wheelchair to freewheel via the exploits of his fictional heroes. The two most popular are John Clayter, spaceman *extraordinaire,* and Ralph von Wau Wau, unique private eye. Ralph, it's true, hasn't exactly stepped into Sherlock Holmes' or Sam Spade's shoes. He isn't built for it. But he is unmatchable at sniffing out evil. And how many male detectives, totally unclothed, can enter a ladies' restroom without causing an uproar?

1.

It was on a bitterly cold night and frosty morning toward the end of the winter of '79 that I was awakened by a long wet tongue licking my face: It was Ralph von Wau Wau. The streetlight under which our Volkswagen was parked shone upon his eager face and told me that something was amiss. Rather, I'd missed a miss.

"Come, Weisstein, come!" he cried. "The dame is afoot!"

He spoke in English, for some reason preferring its use when we were alone.

"Good Heavens!" I said. "Surely, you can't mean Fraulein Saugpumpe?"

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He chuckled and then switched from Basil Rathbone's voice to the one he preferred when he was especially sarcastic. You would swear that you were hearing Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon.*

"Who else have we been watching for for five straight days and nights, sweetheart?" he said. "Pippi Long Stockings? She just went around the corner. Get on the stick, Doc, and step on the gas. Or would you prefer to keep on dreaming of Frau Scarletin?"

He pressed the specially installed button on the dashboard. The door swung shut. He can open and close the door by bending his paw at right angles to his leg and pulling the handle out. But he usually uses the mechanism actuated by the dashboard and a toggle switch under the fender. Those familiar with our adventures will remember that we fitted the Volkswagen with this device during the rather horrendous events of *The Hind of the Baskerbergs.*

I started the motor and put the gear into first. As we drove away from the curb, headlights suddenly struck us and a loud deep horn blared. I slammed on the brakes, and Ralph bounced into the dashboard and fell on the floor. The huge Diesel truck roared by, missing our left fender by an inch.

"Are you hurt?" I said as Ralph climbed back to the seat.

"No, but you're going to be, pal. Unless you take your mind off that skirt and get with it."

"I really prefer that you not refer to Frau Scarletin in that manner," I said stiffly.

"My apologies, my dear fellow," he said, reverting to his favorite alternate voice. "I had no intention of insulting one who, for you, will always be The Woman. But please do concentrate on the business at hand. Our quarry is a slippery one, a real fox, no pun intended."

I had by then driven the car around the corner. No sooner done than I pulled over to the curb and stopped.

"She's getting into a taxi," I said.

"I'm not blind," Ralph said. "Undoubtedly, she's heading for the airport."

"However could you know that?" I cried.

"To anyone else, she would merely be going to the opera. She's dressed for it, she had no luggage, only a small purse, and in forty minutes *Fidelio* begins. But it is not the magnificent Beethoven she is interested in.

"I was in the alley a half a block away when she came out of the door of her apartment building. Fortunately, the wind was in my favor. I was able to obtain an excellent

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olfactory profile of her. She'd been drinking heavily. Now, we know from the *Polizei* psychological profile of her that when she is relaxed she drinks California brandy. Though she'd also been smoking heavily, I was able to detect through the odor of American cigarettes — Camels, I believe — the telltale molecules of four-year old California brandy stored in re-used white oak barrels.

"Without fear of contradiction I can state that the emitted fumes were of a brandy of 84 proof: pH, 4.48; total acid, 14.3; aldehydes, 5.9; esters, 1.6; fusel oil, 45.5; furfural, 0.18..."

I pulled the car from the curb to follow the taxi, crying at the same time, "Spare me the details, Ralph! I know your nose is an ambulatory chemical-analysis laboratory!"

He chuckled. "If you had memorized the profile as I have, my dear Weisstein, you would recall that she is terrified of flying. Only in extreme emergencies will she travel otherwise than by car or train. She can only overcome her neurosis by imbibing considerable amounts of alcohol. When she entered the building six hours ago, she looked contented and she had been drinking moderage quantities of Armagnac. It's apparent that she's received a phone call necessitating an airplane flight. You do follow my line of reasoning, my good fellow?"

He paused, grinning, his tongue hanging out, a triumphant light in his big brown eyes.

"And I suppose you know where that is?" I said somewhat testily. I was, I admit, in a bad mood. I had been interrupted almost at the climax, if I may use the word, of a most pleasant dream. It would be indiscreet to go into its details.

"Its citizens are a race apart, comparable only to themselves," he said.

"Venice!" I cried, recognizing Goethe's phrase. "But how...?"

I shot the VW into a parking space near Dammtorstrasse 28. Saugpumpe's taxi had stopped before the *Staatsoper* and she was getting out.

"Ha!" I said. "For once, you have erred, Ralph! She *is* attending the opera!"

"Really?" he said. "Have you also forgotten that the police report stated that she is tone deaf?"

"Whenever did that keep people from going to the opera?" I replied. "Perhaps she is meeting a gentleman inside, enduring what is to her a meaningless gibberish for the sake of male companionship."

He switched to Bogart. (From now on, I will refrain from identifying his differing voices except when necessary. I trust the reader can distinguish from the style of speech whether he is

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speaking in the persona of the Great Detective or the hard-boiled dick of San Francisco.)

"Bushwa, pal. She's shaking her tail, I mean, ducking her shadow. She still thinks she's the meat in a Hamburger police bun. She doesn't know the shami — that's the plural of shamus, sweetheart — were pulled off five days ago."

I groaned. Perhaps Ralph preferred English because only in that language can one make appropriate — or inappropriate — puns preserving the peculiar flavor of those two immortal mythics. Personally, I prefer Dr. Thorndyke.

A few minutes later, we were standing by the entrance to the opera house. We were in Guise No. 3, I with dark glasses and a cane, holding a leash attached to Ralph's harness. We stood there twelve minutes, the only interruption being a doorman who asked if he could do anything for us. I told him that we were waiting for my wife.

Presently a man in evening clothes came out, passing us with only a glance. The doorman whistled a taxi for him, and he was carried off.

"He looked mad," I said. "Perhaps his date stood him up."

"That was Saugpumpe, you simp! Get the lead out! Hump it! We'll lose her!" And he dragged me along willy-nilly behind him. Ralph weighs one hundred and sixty pounds, about seventy pounds more than the average German shepherd dog. Besides, his father was half-Canadian timber wolf.

As we got into the VW, he said, "I smelled her. OK, I apologize. I keep forgetting you don't have my keen nose. That disguise would've fooled me, too, if I'd just eyeballed her. Maybe. Didn't you dig that hipswaying? She was trying to walk like a man and almost succeeded."

"I thought he might just be a little, you know, on the ambiguous side," I said.

"Always the gent, ain't you, Doc?"

As we drove away, I said, "How do you know she's going to Venice?"

"That's where the long green, the loot, the mazuma is just now. And where the carrion is, the hyenas gather. In this case, Giftlippen and his sidekick, Smigma. Things must be about ready to pop open. Otherwise, Giftlippen wouldn't have called in his old lady."

"But," I said, "Giftlippen and Smigma are dead! They were blown to bits last year at Marienbad when the Czech police ambushed them. You know that. You set up the trap for them."

"How many wooden pfennigs have you got in the bank, Doc?"

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2.

As Ralph had predicted, her taxi went straight to the Northern Aircross, the airport at Fuhlsbuttel. I hope my foreign readers will forgive me if I mention, with some pride, that it is the oldest airport in Europe. It also has some of the longest lines at the ticket counter in the world. Ralph stayed in the car while I waited by the counter and ascertained that Saugpumpe was indeed going to Venice. Fortunately, she was so intoxicated that her normal perceptiveness was missing. She didn't notice me. Also, I suppose she must have been sure she had eluded her shadows, if any.

She was still in her male clothes, passing as a Herr Kleinermann Wasnun. I returned to the parking lot, where I got out of the trunk our forged ID's and other papers. Among these was a health certificate from a licensed veterinarian, required for a seeing-eye dog traveling to a foreign country. I wrote in the date since it is invalid if issued over fifteen days before leaving. I then muzzled Ralph, another requirement; and with a suitcase which is always packed for such emergencies, we proceeded to buy a ticket. (A blind man's dog travels free.) Of course, we couldn't board Saugpumpe's airliner. Even she would have thought it suspicious that we would have been at the opera and on her plane, too. She took a Lufthansa directly to the Lido Airport, and we left on an Albanian airliner to Rome. Not, however, before I had phoned Lisa Scarletin. When I hung up, I found that Ralph had been eavesdropping.

"You look like one of Dracula's victims," he said. "She really chewed you out, didn't she?"

"Yes. She said this was the last time. She gave me seven days more. If the case isn't wrapped up by then, I can either abandon it and return to Hamburg. Or..."

"Or forget the wedding bells, heh? Well, Doc, you can't blame her. She hardly ever gets to see you, and you lead a very dangerous life. Besides, women regard their competitors as bitches, but a male dog...unforgivable! I won't crowd you. You're a big boy now. You can make your own decision."

"Either way, I lose!" I cried.

"That's life for you." But his involuntary whine betrayed him. He was as upset as I.

The flight was pleasant enough, though marred by three minor incidents. One was when a scowling Albanian commented, in his native Gheg, about us. I leaned down to Ralph, who was lying in the aisle by my seat, as regulations required. "What did he say?"

"How the hell can I talk with this muzzle on?" he said.

Reassured that I could hear him

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— after all, the voder in his throat doesn't depend upon his lip movements — he said, "Something about a capitalist dog."

"What?" I said. "I shall certainly complain to the stewardess. After all, the Albanian Airline is trying to drum up business, and they certainly won't get any good will if they allow their passengers to be insulted."

"For cripes' sake, pipe down!" he said. "He was referring to *me*. And quit talking. They're staring at us."

Sometime later he rose while I was eating. Through a lifted lip, he said, "How's the rabbit stew?"

"Delicious. But I can't give you some. You know I can't unmuzzle you to eat."

"It ain't rabbit, Doc. It's *cat!*"

I suddenly lost my appetite. And I was furious, but I could not complain. I didn't want to draw any more attention to myself. Besides, how could I explain that I knew the difference between cat and rabbit without admitting that I was well acquainted with the taste of both?

About an hour before we landed at Rome, Ralph again put his head on my lap. "I can't stand it any more," he said. "I gotta go!"

"No. 1 or No. 2?" I said.

"Do you want a demonstration in the aisle? Let me into the toilet before I bust."

It was most embarrassing, but Ralph insisted on the intensity of the urgency in terms which would affront the more delicate of my readers. In fact, they affronted *me*. Even more furious, I rose and tap-tapped my way down the aisle with the leash in my other hand. The passengers started, but they assumed of course that I was the one in need. Once at the door of the toilet, which fortunately was in the rear, I observed that no one was looking. I quickly opened the door and Ralph bounded in and sat down on the seat. I shut the door, but a few seconds later it occurred to me that if anyone did look back he might be surprised. I went into the toilet quickly and locked the door.

"I was wondering what you were doing out there," Ralph said. "I don't know what the Albanians consider a low sanitation level, but they might object to a mere canine using their facilities."

"Hurry up," I said. "The other toilet's occupied, and somebody might want to use this one at any moment. If he should see us emerge together from this place, well..."

"Can it, Doc! No pun intended. I've been able to adapt to living as a human in most respects. But I am a dog, and in some things I'll always be a dog. For Homo sap, Number 1 relief is a continuous process, quickly done. For me, it's intermitent, and it's long, though

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highly pleasurable. So keep your shirt on."

I sweated, and then at last Ralph was finished, and I opened the door. And what I'd dreaded, happened. A fat, frowzy, and elderly woman was waiting outside. Her expression of impatience, and perhaps of some slight pain, became astonishment. Then revulsion. She poured out a flood of furious protest mixed with some invectives, I'm sure, though I didn't understand a word of it. Ralph growled, and even though muzzled he scared her. She backed up, screaming for the stewardess. There was quite a commotion for a while. I got back to my seat and sat down, and then the stewardess, speaking German, asked me for an explanation.

"It's simple," I said. "The dog was suffering, and so I took him where he would no longer have to suffer."

"But that is for the passengers," she said, though she was having difficulty repressing a smile.

"The dog is a passenger," I said. "And I didn't see any sign forbidding use by animals. Besides, he's much cleaner than her," and I pointed to the fat woman glaring at us from across the aisle.

"Oh, you mustn't say that!" she said. "She's a commissar!"

But she returned to the woman; they talked for a while, and that was the last I heard of that. However, after disembarking, Ralph pulled me up alongside the woman, who was trudging across the field carrying a large attache case. He lifted his lip, said something, and then dropped back. She looked back, this time with a frightened look, and then broke into a waddling run.

"All right," I said. "What did you say?"

"Do you know Albanian for *up yours?*"

"Ralph," I said, "that was stupid. We've had a lot of publicity. She might put two and two together and..."

"And come up with *vier,*" he said. (I should explain that the German word for *four* sounds much like the British English *fear.*)

"Anyway," he continued, "she'll convince herself she was mistaken. It's been my experience that nobody really believes in a talking dog until he's been around me for a while."

"Nevertheless, that was stupid. It could jeopardize our mission."

"I'm human, all too human. Likely to give way to self-destructive impulses. I apologize again. You're entitled to that remark. God knows how many times I've called you stupid. I've regretted it later, of course. After all, it's not your fault you don't have my high IQ"

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3.

For the reader who knows nothing about Ralph — though it seems incredible in this day of global TV — I'll recapitulate his career. Ralph was the result of experiments by psychobiologists at an institute in Hamburg. They were able to raise the intelligence of various animals through the implantation of an artificial protein. These developed into billions of cerebral nerve synapses, making the brain not much larger but immensely more complex.

German shepherd dogs were not the only experimental animals at the institute. The scientists had succeeded in raising the intelligence of all their subjects and also increased the size of many. The sentient beasts had included donkeys, bears, otters, rodents of various kinds, and a gorilla.

The person believed to be chiefly responsible for the IQ-raising techniques was Professor Pierre Sansgout. He was a biologist who had been fired from the University of Paris because he preferred German beer to French wine.

Blackballed everywhere in his native country, he had gone to work for the Hamburg institute. Apparently, the explosion that killed everyone but Ralph at the institute was Sansgout's fault. From the few notes escaping destruction, it was learned that his pet project was the mutation of bees which would directly produce mead. According to a note, he had done this, and the alcoholic content of this mead was eighty percent. However, he, and the institute as a whole, had become victims of oversuccess. The source of the explosion was traced to a giant hive on his laboratory table.

Ralph was now twenty-nine but was as vigorous as a man of the same age. No one knew how his lifespan had been extended. The explosion had also destroyed the records. There was speculation that the scientists had discovered an age-delaying "elixir," which had been injected into the beasts. But no one really knew.

Ralph was a pup when the explosion occurred. Legally, he was a *Schutzhund,* the property of the Hamburg Police Department. He came close to being destroyed — "murdered," Ralph said — by the HPD because of his slow growth, which matched the pace of a human infant. But when he uttered a few words while on the way to the gas chamber, he was saved. The HPD realized what they had and gave him an education.

Investigation revealed that a voder had been implanted in his throat. This was connected to cerebral circuits which enabled him to switch it off and on and

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converted his linguistic thoughts into spoken words. As he grew older, larger voders were implanted. At the present, the voder contained circuits enabling him to speak with a perfect accent all twelve of the world's great languages and a number of the minor.

However, Ralph wasn't fluent in all of these. He had not as yet mastered all. Nor could he speak all of these with perfect grammar or a large vocabulary. But he was learning. The voder also contained different voice circuits. Hence, he had two male, one female, and one child's voice. He could also whistle, meow like a cat, utter ten different bird calls, and the decibel level ranged from that of a bullhorn to a whisper.

Every four years, the voder had to be removed and its tiny atomic battery replaced.

On becoming a juvenile, Ralph went to work for the HPD. He soon became famous because of his success in solving crimes. Eventually, he tired of this and applied for freedom and a license as a private detective. Those familiar with my chronicles will know that he had to endure a trial to establish his legal right to become a German citizen. Ralph won, but he also had to pay back the HPD for the expenses of his education. Thus, though he often earned fabulous fees, he was still sending large monthly amounts to the HPD.

A bitter aggravation of his financial distress had been brought about by the very villain we were tracking, Giftlippen, Baron Rottenfranzer. Before taking up a criminal career, Giftlippen had been an eminent literary critic and an affluent literary agent. Though a native and resident of the tiny principality of Liechtenstein, his influence was enormous all over the world. When Ralph's novel, *Some Humans Don't Stink*, came out, Giftlippen had turned thumbs down on it. His venomously unfair and viciously scornful articles had resulted in small sales for the book. (He even had the audacity to claim that it was authored by a ghost writer.)

Recently, we'd heard that the English translation was selling well. But the American royalties had not yet arrived.

I once asked Ralph how it was possible for a distinguished and highly educated man like Giftlippen to become a crook.

"From literary critic to criminal is only a short, almost inevitable, step," Ralph had replied bitterly.

Smigma had been a noted Polish author of didactic fairy tales. He was also Giftlippen's good friend and client. His fiction, however, was only a sideline. He was a high official in the

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communist propaganda bureau. Then a strange thing happened after he'd suffered brain damage in a car crash. He found himself unable to utter a falsehood. This, of course, rendered him unfit for writing propaganda or fiction. (This characteristic would trip him up in *The Case of the Jesting Pilot.*) It also made him dangerous to the state. He fled Poland and joined Giftlippen.

In the case titled *A Scarletin Study,* I recount my own career as a physician for the Autobahn Patrol Medical Department. During an encounter with the murderous Rottenfranzer Gang — oil-hijacking specialists — I suffered a wound which hospitalized me. I retired and took up private practice without much success. During this time I met Ralph, who was looking for a human to share the expenses of his apartment. I abandoned my practice and became Ralph's full-time partner.

It was an exciting life, but now I had to make a choice between Lisa and Ralph. She would accept no more excuses that I was sorely needed by Ralph.

While we were waiting for our plane, Ralph explained why we were going to Venice.

"Here's the setup, Doc. Venice has slowly been sinking at the rate of 2.08 centimeters annually since 1920. It doesn't sound like much, but Venice is flush with the surface of the sea. In addition, the tides and seiches that sweep through the lagoon from the Adriatic cause a lot of trouble. And the atmospheric pollution from the factories of Mestre, the nearest mainland city, are destroying the art treasures, the building exteriors, the paintings, the statues, et cetera.

"The islands of Venice are sinking because of withdrawal of water through wells. The water-bearing strata are subsiding. And it won't do any good to pump water back in, according to the scientists. Venice seemed doomed.

"Meanwhile, a short time ago, a savior, or a man who claims to be a savior, appears. He's a strange man with a strange story. His name *was* Giuseppe Granelli. He was born and raised in the backwoods of the Italian Alps. His village was destroyed in a landslide. He was the sole suvivor, though crippled for life. But during his convalescence he had a selcouth experience."

"Selcouth? What does that mean?" I said.

"It's an archaic English word meaning *unusual* or *strange,* my unlearned colleague. Granelli had a series of visions which revealed to him that he is the reincarnation of the most famous Doge of Venice, Enrico Dandolo, died 1205. He adopted the name and came to Venice in his wheelchair. There he

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proclaimed his real identity and his mission and organized the Venice Uplift Foundation. Despite the sound of its title, it is not an organization to raise money to buy a bra for the goddess of the sea."

"Spare me," I murmured.

"Dandolo's ideas for salvation sound feasible, though they'll cost a hell of a lot of money. He aroused vast enthusiasm. Mazuma pours in from art lovers, rich and poor, from all over the world. We kicked in twenty marks ourselves, remember, Doc? Had to skip a few meals but we considered it worth it."

"*You* did," I said. "Lisa was upset when I took her out to a Colonel Sanders' instead of the Epicurean's Club."

"Economics always wins over esthetics. Anyway, the Fund's funds are kept in a Venetian bank. So far, eighty million dollars American, and more coming in. And in two days the various festivals will start, including the traditional Marriage of the Sea of the Doge."

"And you think this vast sum will tempt Giftlippen? And he'll attempt a robbery during the confusion of the festivals?"

"Bingo! Give the man a kewpie doll! Look, I could be wrong. But it'll be the first time. Why should Giftlippen's mistress suddenly take off for Venice? It's because Giftlippen isn't dead, and he needs her for more than just sexual satisfaction."

"And Saugpumpe will lead us to Giftlippen?"

"We'll nail him. And we'll be financially independent. The reward offered for him, dead or alive, by the West German government has not been withdrawn. He's supposed to have perished, but the bureaucrats haven't gotten around to canceling the offer. It's still in effect, legally, and if we get him, we can legally collect. Five million marks. Think of that. You'll take your half and marry Mrs. Scarletin with your head held high. You won't be a down-at-the-heels quack marrying a rich widow."

"I don't care for your choice of words," I said. But it was an automatic response. I had gotten used to Ralph's taking his resentments out on me. Even though he had proved a hundred times that he was smarter and more educated and competent than most humans, he was still patronized by many. To them, he was just a freak. There were many who didn't believe that he was just a freak. There were many who didn't believe that he was truly sentient. I've even read articles where it was hinted that he couldn't speak at all, that I was a ventriloquist. The worst, in his eyes, were those who talked down to him, who insisted on petting him. He couldn't stand

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this. Not even I was allowed to pat his head. Lisa was the only exception so far.

He had once explained to me why she was granted this privilege.

"Dogs are inherently pack animals. I don't mean beasts of burden. I mean members of a pack. In a pack there's always one leader to whom the others defer and make submissive gestures. This is in the wild state, you comprehend, my dear fellow. But domesticated dogs have the same instincts, which is why they adapted to human society so well and why dogs have become the favorite pets of most people. But they're all psychologically mixed up by domestication. Some are one-man dogs, will allow only their master or mistress to pet them. Other dogs will allow any familiar human or stranger to pet them. Every human is, to them, a pack leader.

"I have the same instincts, but I am also, in a sense, human. I regard myself as the leader, whether the pack is Canis or Homo. But there's something about Mrs. Scarletin, call it charisma or whatever, that makes me want her to pet me. It's humiliating, in a way, because I'm more intelligent, more perceptive, and stronger. But that's the way it is."

"That's the way it is with me, too," I said.

4.

Coming in at 12,000 feet, I could see the whole of the Laguna Veneta and much of the mainland in the late April sun. Two islands form part of the barriers which almost seal off the lagoon from the Adriatic: the Lido and Pellestrina. The former looks like an extended human shinbone; the latter is little more than a semideserted thin flat reef, now frequently awash. Between the two is a strait through which the high tide poured to send water swirling around the islanders' ankles.

Within the lagoon were the 116 closely spaced islands. A motor and train causeway connected Venice to the mainland. Smoke poured from the stacks to hundreds of factories in Mestre.

We sank down, then came in low over the Lido. Looking down, I could see the famous golf course at the western end. A minute later, we had landed on the airport at the other end. The Lido is, I believe, the only island on which vehicles are permitted. We took a Fiat taxi to our hotel. Since we did not have much money, and wanted to be inconspicious, we had reserved a room at the Rivamare, a third-rate hotel facing the Adriatic. The Lido was crowded and festive, as were all the major islands. We were lucky to get rooms at this time, when Labor Day, Accension, Corpus Christi,

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and the Marriage of the Sea coincided on May 1. Moreover, the Doge Dandolo had been attracting large crowds even out of season.

The taxi driver cheated me, which infuriated me. But since I was supposed to be blind, I couldn't protest.

I ordered a bottle of Falerno, two bowls of *burrida,* and a dish of *capotano* for me and of *fegatino* for Ralph. We finished them off with *cassata siciliana,* a rich cake with ice cream.

I then spent some time on the phone, calling hotels on the main island. Finally, the clerk at the Danieli informed me that a Herr Wasnun was registered there. We at once took a vaporetto, a steamboat, to the Riva degli Schiavone, a promenade facing the lagoon by the Canale di San Marco. A cluster of hotels was along here. The most famous, and expensive, was the Danieli.

"George Sand and Alfred de Musset stayed there in Room 13," Ralph said. "The Doge Dandolo resides there. More to the point, Fraulein Saugpumpe is there. She didn't have any trouble getting a room there; it had been reserved for her for a long time. So I suspect that our quarry, Giftlippen, is also residing there. The *arschloch* always did travel in style.

"Also, you'll notice that the Banco di Manin is nearby. That's where the Fund's money is deposited. But I suspect that Giftlippen has more in store for Venice than just cleaning out a bank. I have to give him credit; he does think big."

We were on the point of strolling to the Danieli when our attention was attracted by a commotion on the waterfront. At first we thought it was a brawl, a fight between the supporters of Dandolo and his opposition. A number of Italians decried him because of the stand of the Church. As I said, Dandolo claimed to be a reincarnation of the greatest of the Doges. Reincarnation is contrary to Catholic theology, of course, and the Pope had denounced Dandolo as a heretic and a fraud. Despite this, the majority of Catholics supported the Doge. They wanted Venice saved. Moreover, they regarded this affair as one more event in the love-hate relationship between the Pope and the Italian people.

"If they can give the man in the Vatican the finger, without endangering their immortal souls, they'll gladly to it," Ralph had commented.

The news media had crackled with reports of brawls between the pro- and anti-Dandolists. But the melee, the screaming and shouting and cursing and fistfighting, were

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not caused by theological disagreement. After we got close, we saw that it was a mob scene being filmed for a movie. Suddenly, two men and a woman were pushed into the water, a man yelled, "Cut!" and silence clamped like a giant hand over the mouths of the actors.

But only for a moment. The director began yelling — screaming, rather — and I suddenly realized that the screaming had been done mostly by him. He had an extremely shrill voice, one which carried like a factory whistle for a long distance.

He was an extraordinary person, one who'd attract attention anywhere. He was only four feet high but looked as if he were thirty-five years old. As I found out later, he was actually forty-five. He had long straight hair as black as the bottom of an oil well. His eyes were a beautiful robin's-egg blue. His face was hawklike but handsome. The stocky body was perfectly proportioned. So, though he was often referred to as a "giant dwarf," he was actually a midget, though too tall even to deserve that appellation.

It would be indescreet to record the scorn, the invective, the denunciations of incompetency he hurled at the actors. Suffice it to say that he gave them the worst tongue-lashing I've ever heard. Also, the most entertaining. The man was an artist, a poet, extemporaneously pouring out demosthenics which must have cut the actors to the heart yet made me want to fall on the marble walk with laughter. Of course, I wasn't the recipient of the words and so could enjoy them.

The assistant director argued with him that the scene had been extremely vigorous and loud. There was nothing phoney-looking about it.

"Yeah!" the little man screamed. "Everybody knows you Italians are very dramatic! You can ask somebody to please pass the antipasto, and you look and sound as if you're threatening murder and mayhem! But everybody knows you're mostly bluff and bluster and you just like to hear the sound of your own voices! You're all soap opera characters in real life and about as convincing!

"What I want is sincerity, understand, sincerity! I want you to be really mad at each other! Hate each other's guts. Don't just shake your fists! Slam each other in the breadbasket! Twist a few balls; that'll get some sincerity out of you.

"OK! Take your places and this time do it for real. Think of your opponent as someone who's spit on the pope *and* balled your mother. He has knocked up your sister and won't marry her. He's also the editor of a newspaper, and he's just

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put in big headlines that your aunt is running a whorehouse. As if that isn't enough, he's revealed that your daughter has run off with a married man, a *German* tourist!"

At this point the actors began yelling at him. His voice rose again, blanketing out the others like a lid put on a pot of steaming soup. By this time, the three who'd fallen into the water had climbed out. They stood near him, dripping with the stinking sewage-clotted liquid. One of them was a tall woman with a beautiful face and a superb figure. Her scanty wet clothes clung tightly to her body. All of a sudden, I was no longer in a hurry.

One of the actors was talking to the director. It seemed that he was the agent for the actors' union and he was protesting that they were not being paid to hurt each other.

"I'll pay you! I'll pay you!" the little man screamed. "Godalmighty! Every time I want you to do something extra, put a little sincerity into your shams, you want more *lire!* Are you sure you're not members of the Mafia? It's extortion, pure essence of extortion, blackmail, financial rape, a currency copulation, *lira* lewdness, a Giovanni jazzing! You're bankrupting me!

"OK! Let's shoot it again and do it right this time. You think film grows like spaghetti! Do you think at all? Look, I'll tell you what'll make you mad enough to shuck off your insincerity like a stripteaser drops her panties! Think of your opponent as me! And I've just told you you're the illegitimate son of a Sicilian!"

That did it. No Italian will admit that Sicilians are real Italians, or so I've often been told by them. The North Italians look down upon the South Italians, and both look down on the Sicilian. I don't know who the Siciliano looks down on. The Maltese, perhaps.

The mob held a brief but spiritied discussion. The agent said a few words to the director, something like *"Ah fahng goo,"* and all, including the cameraman, walked off. For a moment, the big midget was speechless, than he shouted, "You're fired! Discharged for incompetency! Come back, do you hear? Come back or I'll put barnacles on your gondolas! Oh, my God, why did I ever come to this garlic swamp?"

Yelling, he hurled the camera into the canal and stamped around as if he would leave his footprints in the marble.

"Childish tantrums," I said to Ralph.

Ralph said, "I know who he is! He's the famous, or infamous, Cordwainer Bird!"

Immediately I recognized him. Bird was an American, an inhabitant of Los Angeles who had

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in recent years been much in the world's eyes. Originally, he had been a science-fiction writer, author of works well-known in his peculiar genre. These included such strange titles as *I Have No Can and I Must Go, Pane Deity* or *Up Your Window, The Breast That Spouted Cholesterol into the Arteries of the World, The Whining of Whopped Whippets,* and *Dearthbird Stories.*

At the same time, he had managed to rise to the top as a TV and movie writer. But his inability to tolerate tampering with his scripts by the producers, their mothers-in-law and mistresses, directors, actors, and studio floorsweepers had gotten him into trouble. After several incidents in which he almost strangled some powerful producers, he was blackballed in Hollywood.

Simultaneously, he was frustrated in his efforts to impress the literary critics of New York. He wrote several mainstream novels which the "East Coast Literary Mafia" — as he called it — reviled. He became destitute, which was the normal state of most s-f writers. But he was a fighter, and he vowed to smash the Manhattan cartel, which existed to encourage native Gothamites whose shoddy works counterfeited emotions and destroyed the imagination of readers. He sold his stately mansion in Sherman Oaks at a loss and hitchhiked to New York. There he engaged in a guerrilla war with the critics and their allies, the publishers, distributors, and truck drivers' union.

And here he was, Cordwainer Bird, apparently making his own movie.

At that moment he saw us. He stopped, stared, then bounded grinning toward us.

"Wow! What a magnificent dog!" he said to me. "Is it all right to pet him?"

I wasn't surprised at this request. Many people desire to do this. And Bird's reputation as an ardent canophile was well-known.

"There's only one person he's permitted to do so," I said. "But you can try. He won't bite, though."

Bird reached out a hand. I was surprised and, I must admit, somewhat jealous, when Ralph submitted to his stroking.

"Holy, Moly!" Bird said. "I think I'm in love! Listen, I don't want to offend you, but I'd like to buy him! Name your price."

This was too much for Ralph. He growled and lifted his lip, baring teeth that would have given a hungry leopard second thoughts. The idea of being sold, as if he were just an animal, offended him.

"Hey!" Bird said. "He acts like he knows what I'm saying!"

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Coaxingly, he said, "Come on, pal. I wouldn't hurt your feelings for anything. Say, what's his name?"

He thrust out his hand again and stroked Ralph's ear.

"He's not for sale," I said. I tugged at the leash and Ralph trotted on ahead of me. But he kept looking back as if he regretted having to leave.

Suddenly, Bird was in front of me. Before I could resist, he had removed my large dark glasses and ripped off my false mustache.

"Ah, ha!" he said. "I thought so! *Herr Weisstein und der wunderhund,* Ralph von Wau Wau! I might've thought another German shepherd could be as big as Ralph. But it was evident he understood every word I spoke. Wow! Weisstein and von Wau Wau!"

"You sure blew it, sweetheart," Ralph said to me.

I sputtered with indignation. "Really," I said. "What could I have done? What did I do to give us away? It was your reaction that aroused his suspicions."

"Never mind that." He spoke to Bird. "For Pete's sakes, be a pal and give him his glasses and mustache. We're on a case!"

Bird smote his forehead with his hand. "Holy Jumping Moses! You're right! I am a dummy."

Unfortunately, the hand with which he struck his forehead was holding the mustache. It stuck to it when his hand came away. He handed me the glasses and then started to look around. "Where'd it go?"

I ripped it off his skin and replaced it with trembling hands. "By now all of Venice must be on to us," I said.

He looked quickly around. "No, nobody's looking this way. You're Okay. So far. Listen, I don't want to horn in if I'm not welcome. But I've been looking for some real excitement. Life has been an emotional downhill slide since I cleaned out the New York establishment. I'd like to be dealt in this. I have certain talents which you could use. And it'd be a great honor to work with the great von Wau Wau. I'd do it for nothing, too. But don't tell my agent I said so."

"The best thing you could do for us would be to swear to keep silent about us," I said frostily.

I spoke to Ralph. "Isn't that so?"

"My dear fellow," Ralph said. "It *isn't* so. We're up against a great criminal, the deadliest biped in Europe. I've studied Mr. Bird's exploits in New York, and I believe we could use him with great advantage to our mission."

I was struck dumb with astonishment. Ralph had always said he wouldn't dream of taking in

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another partner. He had enough to do to put up with me. Of course, he was jesting when he spoke so disparagingly of me. But though he liked me, perhaps — dare I say — even loved me, he resented having to depend upon a human. As he once said, "Weisstein, you are my hands." Of course, he had to spoil it by adding, "And all thumbs, alas!"

But there was some sense in what he said. We could use a man of Cordwainer Bird's caliber. By which I mean that, though he looked like he was a BB gun, he shot a .44 Magnum. Besides, if he got mad at us, he could expose us. And that might be fatal.

At an outdoor restaurant we outlined to him our mission over a bottle of *soave* and a plate of *baccala.* Bird, however, refused the wine. He neither smoked nor drank, he said. He didn't seem to like it that Ralph lapped up the wine from the platter by my feet, but he said nothing.

"Bend an ear, buddy," Ralph said. "You're in the midst of shooting a flicker. You'll have to forget about that now. Can you stand the expense, all that money tied up?"

"No sweat," Bird said. "I'm backing and producing this myself. I'll show those Hollywood phonies a thing or two. I wrote the script myself, too. It was originally titled *Deaf in Venice.* But I decided on a more eye-catching title. I'm great on that, you know. How about *Ever Since I Met Her in Venice, I've Had Trouble With My He-ness?"*

"You'll need a wide screen," I said.

At that moment, we heard a blare of trumpets and a banging of drums. Everybody got up from their tables and ran to the crowd pouring out of the hotels and streets. I called to a man hurrying by, and he said, *"I'l Doge Dandolo!"*

We stood up and looked out across the Canale di San Marco. A boat had appeared from around the island of San Giorgio Maggiore. I recognized it at once, having seen it many times on TV, It was magnificent, coated with gold, propelled by sixty oarsman, an exact replica of a late medieval barque. On a platform in the stern stood some people dressed, like the oarsmen, in twelfth-century Venetian costumes. After a while, we could see the Doge himself. He sat in a wheelchair, an extraordinarily large one, also coated with gold. It was said to be self-propelled with a steam engine fueled by a small atomic reactor. As the barque stopped by the *riva,* a gang of flunkies from the Danieli Hotel ran out and placed an ornately carved gangplank onto the boat.

Ralph said, "Watchfor Saug-

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pumpe, amigo. I'll nose around and try to pick up the scents of Giftlippen and Smigma."

I released the leash and he trotted over to the crowd cheering on the quay. Bird left on his task, a rather distasteful one. He had to dive down into the stinking waters and recover his camera. Ralph had said that he could pose as a TV-news cameraman. He could take pictures which we could study later, hoping to identify our quarry in the crowds. Also, posing as a newsman, he could be seen everywhere without arousing suspicion.

I remained on my chair to observe both the crowd and the hotel entrance. I had difficulty not keeping my attention strictly on Dandolo. He was a huge man with a disproportionately large head. His features were exactly those of the late Doge whose reincarnation he claimed to be. They were immobile, waxy, their deadness the result of the landslide which had buried him for three days. He could, however, move his lips and jaws. He always wore fur gloves, reportedly to conceal hideous scars. A tigerskin robe covered his legs.

The wheelchair and its occupant rolled off the platform and down the gangplank. He was surrounded by his retainers and the hurrahing crowd, but I got up on my chair to get a good view before I remembered that I was supposed to be blind and hastily got down, I saw him clearly. By his side was his chief assistant and valet, Bruto Brutini, a small bespectacled man, prim-faced, bald and bearded.

He carried an ornately chased golden bowl full of shelled walnuts and pecans. Dandolo dropped his hands into this and threw a dozen at a time into his mouth. His addiction to nuts was well-known.

Presently, the *riva* was almost deserted, the crowd having collected around the hotel entrance. Ralph came back and allowed me to leash him again. "Order another bottle of *saove,*" he said, his tongue hanging out. "That was dry work."

"Any luck?"

"No, damn it. For one thing, both Dandolo and Smigma were too heavily perfumed. It overrode every other odor in the crowd. I wonder why they used perfume instead of taking a bath. Perhaps it's because that's what the old doges did. Dandolo is said to be a stickler for authenticity."

Cordwainer Bird rose out of the water, shoved the camera onto the stone, and walked dripping to us. He looked excited; his robin's-egg blue eyes shone.

"You aren't going to believe this. But I was under the barque when it came in."

"You bumped your head?" I said.

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He stared. "Yeah. How'd you know?"

"A wish fulfillment," Ralph said, staring at me. I blushed. There was no fooling him. He knew that I was jealous, though I had tried not to show any sign of such an unworthy feeling. He claimed that he could smell emotions in humans, that they caused a subtle change of body odor. He would have made a great psychiatrist, not only because of his olfactory and emotional sensitivity and high intellect. People have no hesitancy in revealing all to a dog.

"Oh?" Bird said. "Listen, you guys. I did bump my head, but not on the bottom of the barque. I rammed it into metal six feet below the barque! Curved metal!"

"What was it?" I said.

"Hell, man, it was a submarine!"

I gasped, and Ralph whined.

"Yeah, there's a tiny submarine attached to the bottom of the barque!"

5.

"Donnerwetter!" Ralph said, reverting in his surprise to his native tongue. Then, "Of course, what a blockhead I am! All the clues were in front of my nose, and I failed to smell them! How humiliating!"

"What are you talking about?" I said.

"The Doge Dandolo is Giftlippen!"

"However did you deduce that?"

"You mean *infer,* not deduce, don't you?" he said. "How often must I point out the difference? Actually, to be exact, I *gathered.* Check your Webster's."

"For crying out loud!" Bird said. "This is no time for lexical lessons! What's going on?"

"I had thought that Giftlippen would be here because of the Venice Uplift Fund millions," Ralph said. "But I erred again in underestimating that archvillain. He created the fund in order to steal it. But I'm sure that's part of a much bigger ripoff. Exactly what, I don't as yet know."

"But...the clues?" I said.

"It's too early to tell you. Besides, I think I also know the true identity of Giftlippen. It's only a theory, you understand. I prefer not to say anything about it until theory has become fact. But we may proceed on my premise that Dandolo is indeed Giftlippen, who is...never mind that now."

"If this is true," I said. "we must inform the Venetian police."

Simultaneously, Ralph said, "Don't be a sap, pal," and Bird said, "You're out of your gourd."

"One, the police would claim the reward," Ralph said. "And we need the money badly. Two,

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Giftlippen has a habit of bribing a strategically situated policeman or official to tip him off. Sometimes, he even plants one of his own men in a high place long before he pulls a job. The Venetian fuzz may be safe, but we can't take a chance."

"We'll give the big cheese our own *shazam!*" Bird cried.

Bird, I found out later, often reverted in moments of intense excitement to the speech he'd picked up from the comic books he'd read when a youth. Hence, his sometimes old-fashioned and often obscure phrases.

(For the benefit of my German readers, I'll explain that *shazam* was a word endemic in, I believe, the Captain Marvel comicbooks. Uttered by the captain and his juvenile partner, Billy Batson, it gave them superman powers. The American audience will have no trouble recognizing it. Neither will the French, who take comics seriously and even grant Ph.D. degrees for theses on this subject.)

"This turn of events pulls the rug from under us, sweethearts," Ralph said. "If Giftlippen or Smigma eyeball us, we'll be candidates for the morgue. This blind-man-and-his-seeing-eye-dog act isn't going to fool them. Not after our Kuwait adventure, heh, Weisstein?"

He was referring to that series of extraordinary events which I have chronicled as *The Shakedown of the Shook Sheik.*

Ralph suddenly growled. Bird said, "Oh, oh!"

I turned. We were surrounded by seven Arabs. All wore dark glasses and were dressed in flowing robes. The faces of two were shrouded by their hoods or whatever Arabs call them. But they were not concealed enough to prevent me from distinguishing the massive waxen features of the Doge under a fake beard and the prunish lineaments of his assistant. They were all barefoot, and the wind was blowing from us to them. That accounted for their being able to take Ralph by surprise. Their wide loose sleeves had been pulled over their hands, but we could see the silencers attached to automatics.

"You three gentlemen will walk onto the barque with us," Smigma said in a thin high voice with a Polish accent. "Believe me, at the first sign of making a break, we will shoot you down."

I looked around. A number of oarsmen were coming toward us. They would block off the view of the passersby. If we were shot, they'd doubtless just pick us up and carry us off as if we were drunks — a not uncommon sight during the festivals.

That Smigma had addressed us as "three gentlemen" told me that they knew Ralph's identity.

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We said nothing as we were conducted up the gangplank to the center of the boat. A hatch was raised and we were prodded down a ladder into a narrow cabin. Ralph could manage a ladder by himself. Another hatch gave entrance to the submarine attached to the bottom of the barque. We went past the small control room to a cell near the bow and were locked inside. This was so confined that we had no room to sit down. After a few minutes, we felt the craft begin moving and could detect faint vibrations as the propellers pushed us toward an unknown destination.

Ralph quit cursing himself for a dunderhead in six languages, including the Scandinavian. "I suspect, my esteemed but also dumb colleagues," he said, "that Saugpumpe led us into this trap. Giftlippen would want to get me, his most dangerous antagonist, out of the way before he proceeded with his dastardly plot. So, he allowed his mistress to remain under our observation until the last moment."

The only sound then was Bird banging his forehead on the steel bulkhead and muttering, "You cretin, you! Taken like a babe in diapers! Oh, the ignominy of it all!"

After a while, Ralph said, "You'll suffer even more brain damage if you keep that up." That was his way of subtly calling Bird a blockhead. There was one thing about Ralph. Though he had little hesitation in self-reproach, he hesitated even less in reproaching others.

We could do nothing. We couldn't even see the control room, since our door was windowless. After an hour, we felt the sub slow down. Then it stopped, the door was opened, and we were ushered up the ladder. We emerged into a vast cavern illuminated by flood lights. The cave had no visible entrance, which meant that it was beneath the surface of the sea. Our craft lay next to a stone platform almost level with the water. Near it was docked a much larger submarine. Like our vessel, it had no conning tower. Beyond it was a blue sausage-shaped bag of rubber or plastic about sixty feet long and ten feet wide.

Ralph said, "Aha! That sub is a World War I U-boat! I recognize it. It was stolen from the Kiel Marine Museum a year ago! Giftlippen plans far ahead of time, the cunning fellow. He's removed the conning towers because of the extreme shallowness of the lagoon. Otherwise, the towers would project above the surface."

"And the bag?" I said.

"To be towed behind the U-boat. It must contain a metal skeleton to keep it from collapsing. Also, compartments to be flooded

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for submersion. Plus others for transporting the loot and much of his gang back from Venice. Doubtless, he has a large crew planted there, ready to carry out his foul plot."

Prodded by a rifle, we crossed the platform into a tunnel hewn out of rock. This led us for thirty paces to stairs also cut out of the rock. We ascended these into another tunnel made of stone blocks. A man pulled a lever; a section of the wall ground open. We entered a dungeon filled with rusty instruments of torture, a disheartening sight, passed through it and up a narrow winding stone staircase, and came out through another wall-door into a kitchen. It looked exactly like the kitchen of a medieval castle, which, indeed, it was.

After traversing a wide stone corridor, we came into a vast unfurnished room. We climbed up dusty staircases and presently were locked inside a twelfth-story stone cell. I looked through the steel bars of a small square opening in the southeast wall. The castle was set on a hill about fifty feet high. Since the rest of the country hereabouts was so flat, I deduced that the hill was artificial. The builder of the castle had piled earth here centuries ago.

The seward side had been cut to make a perpendicular front and then a stoneblock wall had been erected against it to prevent erosion. (I couldn't see this from my window, of course, but I found out these details later.)

The castle was about half a mile from the shore. An arm of the lagoon a hundred yards wide extended from the shore to the base of the hill. It was the avenue for the sub which had brought us here. Once it, too, had been lined with great stone blocks, but many of these had fallen. A number jutted above the water just below the walls.

Ralph stood up on his hind legs by me. "You can see the islands from here," he said.

Normally, he wouldn't have been able to see that far. Dogs are short-sighted. But he was wearing contact lenses.

"Well, I know where we are," he said. "In the ruined and long-abandoned castle of II Seno. He was a thirteenth-century Venetian, confined by the Council of Ten to his castle. The Council didn't mind his piracy as long as it was restricted to non-Venetian vessels. But II Seno wasn't very discriminating.

"His name, by the way, means 'The Bight' in Italian. And this little recess in the land was also called II Seno. It's still referred to by the locals as II Seno del Seno. The Bight of the Bight. And here

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we are, the bitten among the bighters. A bitter pun, if you will excuse me."

"The desperate among the desperadoes," Bird said. "Okay, now what'll we do?"

At that moment the Judas window in the steel door opened. Giftlippen's enormous head appeared beyond it. "Have you any complaints about the accommodations?" he said in a deep baritone voice. He spoke in German with a Liechtensteiner accent.

"Cut the comedy, crook," Ralph said. "What I want to know is what do you intend for us? I would have thought you'd have kaputted us at once."

"What? And deprive me of the esthetic pleasure of forcing you to watch the rape of Venice?" Giftlippen said. "You, who screwed up my greatest coup? No, my shaggy friend, ever since you thwarted me in Kuwait, I've been planning this very scenario. I want you to view, as helpless spectators, my second-greatest coup. Actually, my greatest, since the Kuwait caper was a failure.

"You'll see the whole thing. Here" — he handed a long telescope to me — "and you won't be able to do a damned thing about it."

He broke into a weird blood-chilling cackling. Bird said, "Sounds just like my uncle, Kent Allard, alias Lamont Cranston. I've heard Giftlippen has a fabulous collection of old radio-show records."

"It *is* a recording," Ralph said enigmatically.

"Tomorrow is the ceremony of the Marriage with the Sea," Giftlippen said. "Ah, wait until you see the priceless wedding gifts the Venetians will be giving me. Of course, they don't know about their generosity yet, and I regret to say that it will be one hundred percent involuntary. But it's the gift that counts, not the intention."

"And after the wedding?" Ralph said.

"Do you know the history of this chamber?" Giftlippen said. "It's rather grim. This is the place where the daughter of a noble starved to death. II Seno abducted her, locked her in it, and told her she could eat when she agreed to share his bed. She refused. I think it only esthetically appropriate that my greatest enemy suffer a like fate."

He paused to chomp on some nuts.

"Legend has it that she ate her own flesh before she expired. A classic case of diminishing returns.

"Now! There are three of you, and I have a wager with my esteemed colleague, Smigma, that one of you will put off the inevitable for a while by dining upon the other

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two. My money is on you, von Wau Wau. You're a dog, and dogs are always hungry. Your canine heritage will triumph over the human. You'll eat your friends, though you may weep walrus tears while doing so."

"By the heavens!" I cried. "You're a fiend! You're not human, you foul beast!"

"I'll go along with that, pal," Ralph said.

Bird snatched the telescope from me and drove its end through the window into the huge face. Giftlippen cried out and fell away. Smigma's face, a safe distance away, succeeded his. He cursed us in Polish, and then the window was slammed shut.

"At least, he'll never forget Cordwainer Bird," the little man said. "His nose crumpled up like a paper cup!"

"I doubt he was hurt," Ralph said. But he refused to elaborate on that statement.

"Hell, they haven't built the cell that can keep me in!" Bird said. He began inspecting the room, testing the steel bars, tapping the walls. Presently he went back to the bars, of which there were three. They were about a half inch in diameter, a foot long, and set into holes drilled in the stone. Bird grabbed one with both hands and braced his feet against the wall. He pulled mightily, the muscles coiling like pythons beneath his skintight shirt. The shirt split along the biceps and across the back under the pressure. The bar bent as he pulled. Sweat ran out, soaked his clothes, and fell onto the floor to form a little pool. And the bar popped out.

Bird fell backward but twisted and somehow landed on his feet. "Like a cat!" he cried, and then, "Begging your pardon, Ralph!"

"My dear fellow, I don't share the common canine prejudice against felines," Ralph said. "Oh, occasionally my instincts catch me off guard when a cat runs by, and I go after him. But reason quickly reasserts itself."

"That's quite a feat of strength," I said. "But even if you get the other bars out, so what? It's a fall of a hundred feet to the base of the castle. And fifty more if you should miss the slight projection of the cliff. Not to mention the boulders sticking out of the sea at the bottom."

"There are birds that can fly but can't dive. And birds that can dive but can't fly. This Bird can do both."

"I admire your confidence but deplore your lack of good sense," I said.

"Don't be such a Gloomy Gus, sweetheart," Ralph said. "Anyway, it's better to go out like a smashed bulb than flicker away while your battery dies by agonizing degrees."

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"It's no wonder Giftlippen denigrated your novel," I said.

"The most unkindest cut of all," Ralph said, wincing.

Bird laughed and bent, literally, to the herculean task of ripping out the other bars. After much groaning and panting and screech of steel riven from stone, plus a miniature Mediterranean of perspiration on the floor, the way was open.

"Disbarred like a shyster!" Bird cried triumphantly.

The window was too small for any person of normal size to wriggle through. Bird, however, wasn't handicapped in this respect. In fact, what some would regard as a handicap was in this case an advantage. If he'd been larger, he could not have gotten through the window.

"But how in the world can you launch yourself from the ledge?" I said. "The window is flush with the outer wall. By no means can you attain an upright position on it. Surely, you don't plan on dropping headfirst from it?"

Bird eyed the opening, said, "Get out of the way," and backed to the door, which was directly opposite the window.

"I'll get you guys out of this mess," he said. "Never fear."

As I shouted a protest, he ran at blinding speed across the room and dived through the window. I'll swear he had no more than half an inch clearance on all sides. I expected to see him bash his head against the stone, much like those cartoon characters who attempt a similar feat. But he sailed through and disappeared. For a moment we stood stupefied, like drunken stand-ins; then we rushed to the window. I got there first and stuck my head through the window. Behind me, Ralph cried, "For heaven's sake, Weisstein! Tell me, tell me, is he all right?"

"So far, so good," I said. "He's still falling."

Even as I cried out to Ralph, Bird cleared the edge of the cliff by a hair's-breadth. Then he was hurtling down alongside the cliff. I expected to see him strike one of the two boulders at the sea's edge. But he shot between the two, disappeared, and the water spouted up after him.

I said, "He went in cleanly. But who knows what the impact of the water after that fall will be? And if the bottom is shallow...?"

I waited for a sign of him while Ralph, reverting in his excitement, barked. I looked at my watch. Twenty seconds since he had plunged through the blue-green surface. Sixty seconds. At one hundred and thirty seconds, I withdrew my head and looked sadly at Ralph. "He didn't come up."

"Look again."

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I turned just in time to see a black head break loose. And, a moment later, a brown arm wave at me. "He made it!" I shouted. "He made it!" I grabbed Ralph's two front paws, pulled him upright, and we danced around and around together.

Finally, Ralph said, "You're not following properly. Let me down."

I did so. Ralph recovered his breath, then said, *"Viola un homme!"*

For the benefit of my readers who don't understand French, this means, "What a man!" I recognized it as the phrase uttered by Napoleon after meeting the great Goethe. And, unworthy emotion, jealousy struck again.

Ralph, of course, smelled it. "My dear fellow," he said, "there's no blame attached to you. I'm sure that if you weren't too big to get through the window, you would have tried it. If you'd also been crazy. Bird was small enough, and insane enough, to attempt it. Let us hope that..."

At that moment a strangled cry came from the door. We turned to see Smigma staring stricken through the Judas window.

6.

Everything happened very quickly after that. Giftlippen, still in his Arabian robes and cloud of perfume, stormed in. He was followed by armed men. I was astounded to see that Ralph was right. His nose *was* untouched. The archvillain looked through the window, whirled, and shouted, "We can still get him!" He gave orders for some men to go after him in the mini-submarine and others to go in a helicopter. We were then conducted downstairs to another tower room. My hands were tied behind my back. The door was slammed shut and bolted.

A half hour passed. Suddenly, the door was unbolted and opened. Giftlippen and Smigma came in with six men. The former's face as impassive and pale as ever, but the latter's was twisted and red. Giftlippen roared, "The Yankee runt got away! But the chopper's still looking for him! He won't dare to come out from the coastal bush until nightfall! By then it'll be too late! I'm moving the schedule up! Too bad! It would have been esthetically appropriate to pull off this job during the Marriage! But you and your friends have no sense of the beautiful, von Wau Wau! So, instead of marrying the bride, we abduct her! Ha! Ha!"

We were hustled back to the cave. The large submarine and the giant plastic bag were gone. Presently we were outbound on the minisub. When the boat stopped, an hour had passed according to

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my luminous watch. Ralph said little during the transit, and I uttered nothing except a few groans. My thoughts, I must admit, were not, like his, directed to means of getting us out of this mess. I could only curse myself for my stubborn and stupid resistance to Lisa. Why had I not said yes, I will marry you at once, abandon this dangerous life? I could now be sharing connubial bliss, not to mention the delights, with Lisa, surely the daintiest thing in slacks that ever walked this planet.

On the other hand, Ralph would have been alone, would have died without a single friend to give him moral support at the fatal moment. How sad to die companionless. And how I would have grieved, have been stricken with remorse, have cursed myself for a coward, if I had not been at his side. On the other hand, there was Lisa...such were my thoughts during that gloomy trip in our dark narrow cell.

The craft stopped with a bump. The cell door was opened to let us into the control room. A man snapped the leash on Ralph's harness while another held a gun to his head. A man wearing a gas mask climbed the short ladder, opened the hatch, and looked out. He removed the mask and shouted down, "All clear!" I followed Ralph to emerge on the deck of the barque by the Riva degli Schiavone.

Ralph sniffed and said, "There's a strange odor in the air."

I could smell nothing except the sewage-laden canal waters. What struck me was the silence. Except for the distant drone of a helicopter and the faraway chug of a *vaporetto,* there was not a sound. The loud babble of the festive crowds was gone. No wonder. Everywhere I looked, bodies sprawled unmoving upon the *riva* and the plaza of St. Mark.

"Great Scott!" I cried. "Are they all dead?"

"Fortunately, no," Ralph said. "That strange odor is the residue of an anesthetic gas. That helicopter must have laid down a cloud of it, rendering all the citizens unconscious. Undoubtedly, all the islands nearby, including the Lido, were also subjected to the gas."

Ralph and I were taken to the poopdeck. The end of his leash was looped through an oarhole and tied. I was made to stand by him; a guard with a Browning automatic rifle was stationed about six feet from us.

Giftlippen strode up to us, his robes flapping in the stiff breeze which had sprung up. He gestured toward the city with his gloved hands.

"You are indeed privileged," he said. "You'll be the only nonparticipant witnesses to the crime of, not

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the century, but of the ages. Unfortunately, you won't be able to report it. But I am allowing you enough time to savor its full flavor. And to contemplate what idiots you were to think you could outwit me. Within one hour, we will have the greatest treasures, those that can be moved, anyway, stowed away."

He waved a hand at the big submarine, which was just to the north of us. Men were lowering paintings, statuettes, chests, and boxes into the giant sausage behind it.

Motorboats roared up, docked, and discharged other treasures: bags of jewels, figurines, statuettes, reliquaries, and paintings. All beautiful, priceless, unique. Among the paintings I recognized N. B. Schiavone *The Adoration,* Titian's *The Annunciation,* Bellini's *Madonna of the Trees,* Vecchio's *Saint Barbara.*

Due to their limited time, the bandits could not take the care needed in moving these fragile works. Fortunately, all had been sprayed with Giftlippen's plastic as part of his professed pollution-prevention program. This saved them from being scratched or chipped. But it broke my heart to see them so roughly handed down into the hatches of the giant bag.

Giftlippen said, "The VUF funds have been removed from the bank. In fact, all the banks nearby have been looted. I'll hold the works of art for several years, then ransom them. But the world is going to pay me for those I've had to leave behind. You see, they've all been sprayed. What the authorities don't know, as yet, is that the plastic is actually acidic. It will in time eat up the paintings and the surfaces of the statues, whether stone or bronze. I shall inform them of this and then demand a large — exorbitant, in fact — sum for the formula of the solvent to neutralize the acid effect. Only I know this."

"What is to prevent the Venetians from removing the acidic plastic?" Ralph said.

"They can't dissolve the plastic by any known means," Giftlippen said triumphantly. "Scraping it off will cause a friction which will accelerate the acidic effect."

He paused. "Magnificent, isn't it? I expect to reap a profit, tax free, of about three billion American dollars."

Again, he broke into that hideous freezing cachinnation.

"And all the time, while a world-wide search is being made for me, I'll be watching them, almost within arm's reach of them."

A moment later, men brought aboard two large tables and set them down on the middeck. Others put piles of plates and tableware on

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the tables. Still others staggered up laden with baskets full of bottles of wine. Four men deposited two huge kettles on a table. Another set by them an enormous bowl of antipasto. Saugpumpe removed the kettle lids, and I smelled spaghetti and spaghetti sauce.

Good Heavens, I thought. Surely they are not so confident that they are going to have a leisurely meal on the return trip?

Ralph said, "You have about a hundred and fifty men in your band? Do they share in the profits? Or do you intend to rid yourself of most of them? I would think a bomb planted on the barque, set to go off after you've escaped in the minisub, would eliminate forty or so. And you must be thinking of flooding the compartments in the bag which will carry most of the others."

I expected Giftlippen to react violently to this. Even if Ralph's speculations were unfounded, the crew might become very suspicious. Enough to decide to make sure there was no double-cross by killing him.

But he only laughed again. He said, "You'd make a great criminal, von Wau Wau. But then crooks and cops are only two sides of a coin, aren't they? And you can't always be sure which is obverse; which, reverse."

He spoke to the guard. "Shoot them if they try to communicate to anybody but me or Smigma."

He walked away, leaving us, me, at least, with gloomy thoughts. Ah, Lisa, I will never see you again!

The gangsters were using small motorcycles towing long low wagons. Both were collapsible and apparently had been transported here in the plastic bag. They were busy, roaring off into the city and returning with wagons laden with treasures.

Presently, the *vaporetto* I'd heard chug-chugged up and docked. Its deck was filled with men and piles of objects.

"How long can they go undetected?" I said. "Surely, the causeway into Venice will be full of cars and the train loaded with tourists? If the traffic is stalled because of the gas, won't the authorities at Mestre investigate?"

"Giftlippen has undoubtedly cut all lines of communication," he said. "And bribed some officials in Mestre to create confusion and delay."

"And Bird, if he survived, won't be able to venture out from the bush until dark," I said. "By then it'll all be over. Still, Giftlippen knows that Bird can reveal his secret. He surely isn't going to return to the castle."

"Not unless Bird is caught. You must realize, my dear fellow, that the chopper has undoubtedly laid

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down a cloud of the anesthetic gas over the area in which Bird is hiding. When the gas is blown away, a search will be made on the ground for the unconscious Bird. If he isn't found, Giftlippen will take an alternate route to safety. He must be impatiently waiting for a radio message that Bird has been snared."

At that moment Smigma gave a shout and hurried up to Giftlippen. He was holding a walkie-talkie. They conferred for a moment. Smigma was smiling broadly. After a minute, Giftlippen walked to us. He said, "Your athletic, but stupid, colleague has been captured! He'll be taken back to a tower cell. From there he can witness your end. It'll make a fine display, and his agony will be increased by knowing that you will be in the explosion!"

"Ah," Ralph said quietly. "You *are* going to blow up the barque! And we'll be in the casualty list?"

"If there's enough of you left to identify," Giftlippen said. "You see, by the time the barque is halfway across the lagoon, airplanes and helicopters from Mestre will be over the area. My agents there can stall an investigation only so long. A time bomb in the barque will go off. Investigators will find only pieces of bodies and the art treasures left from the 'accidental' explosion. The barque will contain only works of lesser value."

Cackling, he walked away. He began shouting at the men who were coming aboard laden with paintings and boxes. I almost felt sorry for them. They would also be victims of the man's diabolical cunning.

"Ralph," I said, "this is it..."

Ralph whined, his nose pointed toward the open hatch, his nostrils expanding.

"What is it?" I said.

"What I'd hoped for. *I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my lips let no dog bark!*"

I recognized the quotation as from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice,* Act I, scene i. But what he meant by it, I didn't know. He was always doing this to me, making obscure references through quotations. Very aggravating.

"If I can catch him once upon the hip, I will feed the ancient grudge I bear him." This was also from *The Merchant of Venice.*

"What in heaven's name are you getting at?" I said.

"Look at Giftlippen and Smigma. They're jumping with joy. *Some there be that shadows kiss; Such have but a shadow's bliss.*"

"Will you stop that?" I said. "And enlighten me?"

"I would not have given him for a wilderness of monkeys."

"It's *it,* not *him,*" I said. Same play, Act III scene i, line 130, I believe."

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"But, since I am a dog, beware of my fangs."

"Act III, scene iii, line 6," I said. "Ralph, this is no time to show off."

The guard was looking at us curiously. Ralph winked and said, "A bird in the hatch is worth two in the bush."

"Oh!" I said. "You mean...?"

I jumped, and Ralph started. Simultaneously, at least a dozen explosions in the city gouted flame and fragments. As their reverberations died, Smigma shouted at the men to get aboard. They hurried up, bearing their loads, onto the barque, the U-boat, and the floating bag.

"He's started fires to make a diversion," I said, staring at the thick black plumes of smoke. "Listen, Ralph! Now's your chance to make a break for it! Snap your leash and run like mad! I'll knock down our guard, keep him from shooting!"

"What, and leave you, my dear friend?" Ralph said. "No! I am touched at your offer of sacrifice. But we'll play this game out together, lose or win, side by side."

I am not ashamed to record that these words of loyalty and love almost made me cry.

A helicopter swept over, and the men cheered. Then, laughing joyously, they disappeared into the U-boat and the bag. Those who came aboard the barque did not, as I had expected, grab the oars and start rowing. The barque started moving as if my magic. But it was the tiny submarine attached to it that was the motive power. It wasn't progressing very fast. It would at this rate only get a few miles from the island before the police showed up. The crew must have known that, but they didn't seem worried. I surmised that Giftlippen must have given them some sort of explanation to put them at ease.

Saugpumpe beat on a gong and yelled at them to come eat and drink, to celebrate their ill-gotten wealth. Poor fools, they crowded around the tables and dished themselves up heaps of spaghetti and antipasto. They grabbed the numerous bottles of wine and toasted each other and their leader. Giftlippen had retreated to the poopdeck to sit on the wheelchair and eat nuts while Smigma and Saugpumpe helped fill the plates and uncapped the bottles.

Within fifteen minutes, the men had become very drunk. Far too drunk for the alcohol alone to account for it, even at the rate they drank. They were whooping and yelling, staggering around, speaking slurredly, and singing off-key.

"Giftlippen is helping us, though he doesn't know it," Ralph muttered. "He's cutting down the

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odds against us. When the time comes for action, move swiftly, Weisstein. We'll still be unarmed. And I don't know when the bomb will go off. Or where it is, either."

We had gone about two miles when one of the men yelled louder than the others. Everybody followed the direction of his finger. There were small objects above Venice, moving so slowly they had to be helicopters.

Giftlippen arose. Smigma and the woman looked at him. He nodded. Some of the men abruptly collapsed and lay snoring heavily on the deck. Others were glaze-eyed and looking around stupidly.

Our guard had not drunk or eaten anything. Obviously he was in the plot. At the moment, he was watching the aircraft.

"Back up to me and spread your bonds as far as they'll go!" Ralph whispered.

I did so, and his teeth snapped down on them, the lips brushing wetly against my wrists. He had the powerful jaws of a German shepherd and even more strength than the average because of his size and the genes of his wolf grandfather. Two snaps, and the thin ropes were severed.

"Stand still! Wait!" Ralph said. "The timing must be of the exquisite!"

I couldn't see him, but I could imagine him moving back to get some slack in his leash. It had a concealed breakaway in it, designed for just such emergencies as this.

Giftlippen was nearing the hatch. Smigma and the woman were by the table. I supposed they were anticipating objections from the crew. Both now held submachine guns they had picked up from under the table. A dozen more men had crashed upon the deck. Those still on their feet were swaying or reeling crazily around.

Of the U-boat and the bag it was towing, there was no sign. It must have dived as soon as possible.

Giftlippen stopped and looked at his wristwatch. "We have ten minutes before the bomb goes off!" he shouted. "Everybody below!"

The guard turned for one last check to us. I did not move. Still carrying his rifle, he hurried toward the hatch. Smigma and Saugpumpe threw down their weapons and trotted toward it also. Giftlippen turned and yelled at us, "*Bon voyage!*" and he broke into that maniacal laughter.

"Ready, set, GO!" Ralph said. He lunged; the leash snapped; he sped past me, a black and brownish-gray blur, silent death.

Smigma and Saugpumpe yelled and stopped. Giftlippen whirled so fast he fell down, his feet caught in the floor-length robe. The guard spun, firing the rifle before he had

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completed his circle. Ralph gave a bound, and his jaws closed on the man's throat.

I was already charging across the deck, intending to pick up the automatic rifle. But as I did, I saw Cordwainer Bird pop up from the hatch.

The guard was on his back, his throat torn open. Ralph wasted no time on him. He sped growling toward Giftlippen, who was back on his feet by now. Smigma and the woman turned and ran back toward their weapons. Giftlippen yanked a huge automatic pistol from beneath his robe and pointed it at Ralph. I yelled a warning to him, but Ralph didn't have a chance unless Giftlippen missed him. At that short range, it was not likely.

Bird had seen this, however, and he made a split-second choice. Instead of going after the others, he hurled himself at Giftlippen. In what is called in American football a blocker's tackle. I believe, or perhaps it was an illegal clip, his shoulder took Giftlippen's feet from under him. Giftlippen flew backward screaming, and crashed upon the deck. His automatic skittered spinning out of his reach.

Bird was up on his feet as if he were made of rubber. Ralph ran by him, his target Smigma and Saugpumpe. Bird, passing by the fallen man to assist Ralph, kicked out sideways. The side of his foot struck Giftlippen in the face, and he collapsed again.

I picked up the rifle and fired several rounds into the air to get the attention of the villains. Everybody ignored me. Ralph leaped high and knocked Smigma sprawling. Saugpumpe bent down to get her submachine gun, but Bird was flying through the air. As if he were broad-jumping, his feet preceded him. She rose and turned to fire at us, just in time to receive Bird's feet in her face. She performed a splended, if involuntary, backward somersault. Thereafter, she took no interest in the proceedings.

"I always wanted to do that to a woman!" Bird yelled exultantly from the deck where he had fallen. "Anyway, she looked like my sixth wife, the bitch!"

Smigma had gotten to his feet. Ralph crouched for another leap. Smigma grabbed the nearest thing he could find for a weapon, the enormous bowl of antipasto. He lifted it above his head, and the contents spilled down blinding him. Smigma, shrieking, cast the bowl hard but missed Ralph. Ralph leaped, but this time not for the throat. He grabbed the man's arm and bit down. Then the two were thrashing around on the deck.

Giftlippen rose, crouching. I stared in horror at his face. It had been broken by Bird's kick,

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literally crumbled. As I stood frozen, he reached up and tore away the rest of the covering. I could not believe my eyes. Then he quickly doffed his robe and kicked off his slippers. I was even more incredulous. This state of shock, I am ashamed to admit, was my undoing. Before I could lift my rifle and start firing, his hand moved and the sinking sun glittered on something streaking toward me.

The fellow, if I may call him that, had depended upon the shock of recognition to paralyze me. It succeeded just long enough for him to pluck a knife from the scabbard at his belt and hurl it. I felt a shock in my right arm; the rifle clattered on the deck; I was suddenly weak. I looked down. The knife and penetrated the muscle of my right shoulder. It wasn't a fatal wound, but it certainly was unnerving.

Giftlippen, chittering, was on me then, had knocked me down, had gone on. I sat up while Bird and Ralph ran toward the poopdeck. I groped for the weapon, could not find it, and thus was unable to prevent Giftlippen's escape.

He was quick, oh, so quick! Even the speedy Bird and the swift Ralph could not catch him in time. He had leaped into the wheelchair, punched some buttons on the control panel, and then was gone. Hidden, rather, I should say. Panels had slid up from the sides of the enormous wheelchair and closed over him. Behind a glass port, his mouth worked devilishly. The two giant front teeth, incisors like daggers, or perhaps I should say, a rodent's, gleamed.

His hands moved again, and the muzzles of two automatic rifles sprang out of the sides. I rolled off the slight elevation of the poop-deck, falling to the deck. Bullets chopped off pieces of the teakwood and then were spraying the deck. Bird dived down the hatch, headfirst, the deck exploding around him. Ralph raced forward and then rolled in toward me, safe from the fire.

He looked at the protruding dagger. "Are you hurt, buddy?"

"Not severely," I said. "But what next?"

"He could hold us here, but he'll abandon ship at once. The bomb's too close to going off. Ah, there he goes!"

The rifles had suddenly ceased their terrifying racket. A few seconds later, there was a splash. Ralph stood on his hind legs. He said, "All clear now."

I stood up. There was no sign of the wheelchair or the thing that had been in it. But it was obvious where they had gone. The railing had been destroyed by the rifle fire to make a passage to the sea.

"There's no use trying to get

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him now," he said. "That wheelchair is obviously submersible, and it's also jet-propelled. He'll go underwater to the shore. But, unless he has another disguise cached away somewhere, he will be easily spotted."

"Yes," I said. "There's nothing that will attract more attention than a six-foot six-inch high squirrel."

7.

There was no opportunity for explanations. Somewhere in the barque, a time bomb was ticking away. We could have escaped in the minisub, but that would have meant leaving sixty or so people to perish. They did deserve to die, but we would not abandon them. It was impossible to carry them into the submarine in the little time left. Besides, there wasn't room for that many.

Bird stuck his head out of the hatch. Ralph shouted at him to look for the bomb. There was only five minutes left. We would help him after we secured Smigma and Saugpumpe.

Bird said, "Right on!" and he disappeared.

Both the culprits were still unconscious. I tied up the woman while Ralph stood guard in case the man aroused. Then I used his belt to bind him. He was a sorry-looking mess, covered with lettuce, mushrooms, anchovies, sliced peppers, and a garlicky oil.

Ralph chuckled and said, "I smote the saladed Polack."

"A slightly altered line from a speech by Horatio, *Hamlet,* Act I, scene i," I said. "Good heavens, Ralph, this is no time for your atrocious puns."

We hastened below deck where we found Bird frantically opening boxes. Though handicapped by my wound, I pitched in. Ralph, cursing his lack of hands, paced back and forth.

"Jumping jellybeans!" Bird said. "Only two minutes to go!"

"It's too late to get into the sub," I said. I was sweating profusely, but I like to think that that was caused by my wound, not panic.

"Sixty more seconds, and we'll have to jump into the sea," Ralph said. "Wait! I have it! Quiet, you two! Absolutely quiet!"

We stood still. The only sound was the lapping of the waves against the hull. Ralph stood, ears cocked, turning this way and that. He had a much keener sense of hearing than we two humans. Even so, if the timing mechanism was not clockwork or if it was covered with some insulating material...

Suddenly, he barked. Then he said, "Damn! My instincts again! That box on the pile by you, Doc! Third one under!"

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I toppled off the top two with one hand while Bird and Ralph danced around. "Forty-five seconds!" Bird shrilled.

The third box was of cardboard, its top glued down. Bird jumped in and tore it open savagely. Ralph stood up on his hind legs to look within. All three of us stared at a curious contrivance. It was of plastic, cube-shaped, and had two small cubes on its top. On the inner side of the left-hand one was a metal disk. Moving slowly from the inner wall of the other one was a thin cylinder of steel. Its tip was only about two-sixteenths of an inch from the disk.

As we stared, the slender cylinder moved a sixteenth of an inch.

"Quick, Weisstein, the needle!"

I snatched my handkerchief from my pocket, but I wasn't quick enough to satisfy Bird. He grabbed it from me and interposed a corner between the disk and cylinder. One more second, and the electrical contact would have been made. I shudder even now as I write of this and a certain sphincter muscle tightens up.

Bird threw the bomb overboard. "Whew! Okay, I'll get the sub going, and we'll mosey back to Venice. But first, *what* the hell was Giftlippen? I know what I saw, but I still don't believe it."

"I had suspected for some time that it was Nucifer," Ralph said. "There were clues, though only I had the background to interpret them. You see, one of the institute animals supposedly wiped out by the explosion was a giant squirrel. Nucifer, Professor Sansgout called him. Nut-bearing. From the Latin.

"Obviously, he wasn't killed. He took to a life of crime, murdered the real Giftlippen, and took over his gang. Smigma joined the gang after Giftlippen was well-launched on his career, you know. He may have been surprised to find that his friend and agent was now a giant rodent. On the other hand, Giftlippen was always a little squirrelly. I should feel bad about the Liechtensteiner's murder...but, after the way he murdered my book...well, no matter.

"Anyway, when Giftlippen — Nucifer, I mean — decided on the Venetian caper, he set up a whole new identity. He triggered off that landslide...cold-blooded massacre of the villagers...and emerged as Granelli, the reincarnation of Doge Dandolo.

"But now he was in the public eye. So, he put on a wax-and-putty head to conceal his bestial features and gloves to disguise his paws. He stayed in a wheelchair when on display, covering his unhuman legs

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with the tigerskin. He stuck his bushy tail down a hole in the chair's seat. When he was in that Arabian costume, he strapped his tail to a leg, as you saw.

"He also made sure that his distinctive squirrel's odor was covered by a heavy perfume. He knew that I was on his trail and that I could expose him after one whiff."

"But why did Smigma also use perfume?"

"Same reason. After Smigma's accident, he suffered a metabolic imbalance, you know. He emitted a cheesy odor which even humans could detect.

"The immobile features, the covering of the legs, the gloves, the perfume all suggested to me his true identity. His addiction to nuts cinched the matter."

"Elementary," I said.

"No, alimentary."

Bird started away. I said, "Wait a minute. However did you manage to appear so conveniently — for us — inside the barque?"

"Easy," Bird said, grinning. Then: "Well, I won't lie to you; it wasn't a breeze. I swam toward the sea to give the impression I was escaping that way. But I returned, working my way through the fallen blocks of stone. Then I swam through the tunnel to the cave. I almost didn't make it. I got to the minisub before the bandits came down. I hid in its engine room, behind the batteries. When everybody left the sub, I came out. I used the sub's radio to send a fake message that I'd been captured. I was taking a chance. If the chopper overheard me, they'd warn Smigma. But Smigma turned the walkie-talkie off right after he got my message.

"First, though, I listened in on him and the chopper. That way, I learned the codewords they were using for identification. Giftlippen's — Nucifer's — was *California.* Isn't that strange? No other names of states were used."

"The squirrel's a double-dyed villain," Ralph said. "But he has a sense of humor. California has the world's biggest collection of nuts."

8.

Nucifer eluded detection. Smigma later escaped from prison and rejoined Nucifer. How Ralph and I caught up with them is described in *The Four Musicians of Bremen.*

Bird used the walkie-talkie to summon the police. They arrested the few crooks in the cave. I say few because, as Ralph had suspected, the gang in the plastic bag had been drowned by their compatriots in the U-boat.

All the art treasures were recovered. And it turned out that Nucifer had lied about the acidic effect of the plastic spray. The

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authorities would have had no way of knowing this, of course, and undoubtedly would have paid millions for a useless formula.

We stayed two weeks for the festivities in our honor. We were made honorary citizens of Venice, and a local artist was commissioned to cast in bronze a commemorative monument of us. It can be seen today in St. Mark's Square. It's well done, though it always causes children, unacquainted with our story, to ask why the dog is grabbing the big squirrel by its tail. Artists, like TV/movie directors, feel no obligation to be historically accurate.

While we were waiting at the Lido Airport, I made another long-distance call to Lisa. Ralph paced back and forth nervously, whining now and then despite his vow to repress this canine characteristic. Cordwainer Bird sat on a bench nearby, writing in longhand his latest novel, *Adrift Just Off the Eyelets of My Buster Browns*. Both, seeing my approach, stopped what they were doing. Bird rose from the bench, though not very far.

"She gave the final ultimatum, Ralph," I said. "It's either she or you. I had to make the final decision right there."

"No need to tell me what it is," he said. "If your long face wasn't enough, the odor of resignation, mixed somewhat with that of repressed joy, would inform me."

"Then it's good-by," I said, choking.

"*Das Ewig-Weibliche/Zieht uns hinan,*" he said.

"*The Eternal-Feminine/Draws us on,*" I said. "The last line of Goethe's *The Gothic Chamber.* He was a wise man."

"A very horny one, too. I'll miss you, Doc. It'll be a new and exciting life in Los Angeles — provided I can get my citizenship papers in the States. But..."

The loudspeaker blared, informing us in Italian, French, German, and English that passengers for Hamburg must enter customs. At least, I thought that was what was said. Like airport announcers everywhere, he managed to make almost everything unintelligible, no matter what the language.

Bird said, "I'll go change our reservations for the plane to L.A." He held out his hand. "Sorry about this, Doctor. I don't like to rip off Ralph from you. But it's your decision."

"Don't blame yourself," I said. "Sooner or later, it would have come. But be sure to get in touch with me."

"I'm not much for letter writing. Ralph'll have to do that. *Auf Wiedersehen,* Doc."

He walked away. I looked at

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Ralph. Then my German reserve shattered, and I knelt down and put my arms around that furry neck and wept. Ralph whined, and he said, "Come on, buck up, sweetheart. You know it's all for the best. You'll lead a dog's life, it's true. But that ain't necessarily bad. Take it from one who knows."

I stroked his ears, shed a few more tears, then rose. "*Auf Wiedersehen.* Though I have this feeling that I'll never see you again."

"Hit the road, Doc, before my guts lose their anchors. *Gott!* If only I had tear ducts! You humans don't know how lucky you are. But we'll see each other now and then. Maybe sooner than you think."

I picked up my bags and walked away, never once looking back. I thought he was just talking to make me feel better. I didn't know how prophetic his words were. Or how distressed I would be to see him. But that is all chronicled in the bewildering adventure of adulation and adulteration, private sin and public confession, branding irons and preachers: *The Scarletin Letter.*

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The F&SF COMPETITION was squeezed out of this issue; a report on Competition 14 will appear next month.

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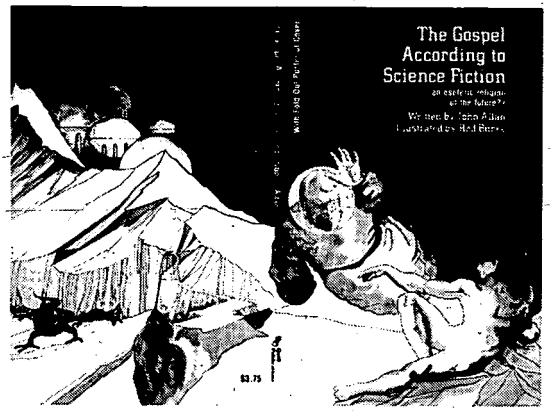

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